

# CHINESE TEACHERS' CONCEPTUALIZATION OF “WHAT IS A GOOD CHILD”

BY

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DISSERTATION

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines contemporary Chinese teachers' beliefs of what constitutes a good child. It explores the meanings that underlie these conceptions and scrutinizes the changes that have transpired in the classrooms as well as in teachers' beliefs over the past ten years. The study employs a combination of observations, interviews, and a survey to examine the research questions. I identified seven principal attributes in a good child: Individuality, Independence, Optimism, Collaboration, Collectivity, Responsibility, and Honesty. The meaning of these attributes is exemplified through vignettes and interview excerpts. Based on these principal attributes, a survey was developed and distributed to a larger population of teachers in attempt to confirm the findings of the interviews and observations and to further explore the research question. Three hundred and forty nine teachers participated in the survey. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the questionnaires. The overall findings indicate a shift of values and beliefs of Chinese teachers that has simultaneously occurred with changes that have taken place in their classrooms as well as in Chinese society.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### **Background**

China has experienced enormous and radical changes during the past 30 years due to the opening up policy, the development of market economy, and globalization. These changes have affected Chinese people in every walk of life, and thus deeply influenced their conception of values and beliefs. Chinese traditional values (such as conformity, responsibility, and hard work) are greatly challenged by new upcoming values brought up by the market economy and by western influence. It has created moral confusion for Chinese people, especially children. To address this issue, the Chinese Ministry of Education issued a major curriculum reform in 1999. The national curriculum was redirected and was adjusted to address these new upcoming values while still emphasizing traditional values.

### **The Goals of the Study**

Given these dramatic changes happening in China, one may well wonder to what extent Chinese culture has changed and to what extent the traditional Chinese values still hold. That is the central question I raise in this study. Through this study, I seek to understand the change in Chinese belief systems and to identify the salient values in contemporary Chinese culture. I hope this study could help answer the questions of how Chinese culture has changed and what is valued in children in Chinese culture now and why. Preschools are where culture is reproduced in a new generation of children (Tobin, 2009). Specifically, in this study, I hope to understand the change in Chinese culture by examining Chinese teachers' beliefs of what constitutes a "good" child. The Chinese

concept of “good” implies a mixture of meanings such as “ideal,” “excellent” and “morally good.” The goals of this study are therefore threefold. The first is to identify what constitutes a “good” child in Chinese teachers’ beliefs. The second is to understand the meaning of a “good” child from Chinese teachers’ perspectives. The third is to reveal what has changed in Chinese teachers’ perceptions, and what has not, and why. I hope that this study is able to identify the core value of Chinese teachers’ beliefs as well as showing the nuances, tensions, and variations of their beliefs and practices.

### **Rationale**

In order to understand the importance of the research questions, one has to understand the historical and political significance of moral education in China, cultural beliefs about children, the One Child Policy, and Chinese teachers’ influential status in Chinese culture.

***Moral education.*** Moral education is a highly valued and time-honored tradition in China, due to the influence of Confucianism and the political nature of education in China. Confucius (551-479 B.C.), the father of Chinese education, believed that education is about moral cultivation of “Ren” (human being). Confucius argued that the cultivation of good moral characters is as important, if not more, as the imparting of knowledge in education. His beliefs became the foundation of moral teachings in China, which influenced Chinese education for the next two thousand years.

Education in China also has been closely aligned with an overt political agenda (Marianne, 1988). At the beginning of the Western Zhou Dynasty (11th century-776 BC), Zhou Gong (an influential philosopher in Chinese history), brought up the concept of “ruling the country by morality.” Confucius also believed that “the first thing to build the

country and to sovereign people is through teaching and learning” (Zhu, 1996, p. 545).

Education in ancient China was primarily used by Chinese emperors to cultivate in people certain moral characteristics that could help emperors rule the country and consolidate the social order.

After the People's Republic of China was established in 1949, the Chinese Communist Party (CPC) continued to place moral education at the center of the educational system. Moral education was an important subject course throughout the entire educational process. The purpose of the education was the political cultivation of the next generation, or “successors for the proletariat,” as shown in Mao Zedong’s 1957 statement, “We should educate people morally, intellectually and physically, so that they become working people possessed of a socialist consciousness and literate minds” (Mao & She, 1989, p. 134). The purpose has not changed 50 years later, as stated in the *Essentials of Reform and Development of China’s Education*, Item 28, distributed by the CPC Central Committee,

The basic task of *deyu* (moral education) in school, i.e., the basic task of education in ideological politics and morality, is to educate students in Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong’s Thought, and in the Theory of Constructing a Distinctive, Characteristically Chinese Socialism; to uphold the correct political orientation, and to cultivate a new socialist generation with lofty ideals, moral integrity and a sense of discipline. (PRCMOEDPR, 1998, p. 33)

The aim of moral education is still about cultivating moral characteristics that can further the development of socialism. Moral education still remains an important course, taught from primary school through university. Given the history and importance of

moral education in China, I believe that it is crucial to examine the moral values in contemporary Chinese culture.

*A good child.* In this study, I choose to examine Chinese teachers' values about what constitutes a good child as a window into reflecting the ongoing changes in Chinese culture. I understand that what constitutes a good child might be different from what constitutes a "good" person. I argue, though, that in Chinese culture, what is valued in a "good" child is just as important if not more, and is not significantly different from what is valued in a "good" adult.

In Chinese culture, a child is expected to have the same values as an adult, for example, to be honest, to work hard, to be considerate, to be responsible, and so on (Meyer, 1990; Xiao, 2001). It is believed that a good child is a prerequisite of a good adult. A popular saying attests, "san cui kan dao lao," which means, literally, one can tell what kind of person the child is going to be based on how the child behaves at the age of three. The Wikipedia translation is "as the boy is, so is the man."

Confucius believed that moral character should be cultivated from early childhood. He believed that human nature develops through habits: "Men are close to one another by nature. It is the influence of environment that sets them wide apart" (Yang, 1980, p. 181). Good habits should be cultivated from early childhood, as Wang (1474-1544 AD), a Confucian educator, wrote:

The innocent child has no preconceived distracting thoughts and can easily accept positive moral education. Such an education could make a person have positive moral character and should be seen as great work. When a person grows up, different kinds of habits are formed. Even if a person is guided by a positive



education, s/he will still approach things with preconceived ideas. Such ideas have been fixed and can not be eradicated. How could they be transformed into positive ideas? Therefore, positive education should begin in innocent childhood.

Chinese education and Chinese culture has always emphasized the cultivation of moral character in children. The One-Child Policy has further called attention to this emphasis. In 1979, the Chinese government instituted the One-Child policy to reduce the “out-of-control” population growth in China. This policy limited each family to one child. The One-Child Policy has had a huge impact on Chinese family structure as well as Chinese culture, at large. China has been traditionally a clan-based society, in which children carry the responsibility to take care of the family elderly. The One-Child Policy made the only child in the family the sole support for the extended family including the child’s own family, and parents, and the spouse’s parents. Subsequently, the Chinese society and family put more focus on their moral and intellectual development.

In recent years, this situation has become more challenging for the first generation of only children as they marry and begin to give birth to their children. Only-children began raising their only-children, which would make the latter “only-children” the sole support for the extended families when they grow up—their own family, their parents’ family, their spouse’s parents’ family, their mother’s side grandparents’ family, their father’s side grandparents’ family, their spouse’s mother’s side grandparents’ family, and their spouse’s father’s side grandparents’ family.

With all the hopes, expectations, and attention on them, only children have been reported to be spoiled by their parents and grandparents. Studies have shown that only children are prone to willfulness, lack of sympathy, thriftlessness, and self-centeredness

compared to children with siblings (Hall, 1987; Lin, 1980), and they are more egocentric, uncooperative, conceited, immodest, unhelpful, fragile, and unlikely to share (Jiao, Ji, & Jing, 1986; Tao & Chiu, 1985). In this context, the moral cultivation of a “good child” becomes extremely important to families, school, and society.

***Teachers’ perspectives.*** Studies have examined Chinese parents’ childrearing values and what they consider to be desirable (Domino & Hannah, 1987; Pan, Chaffee, Chu, & Ju, 1994; Xiao, 2001), but very few studies from the teachers’ perspectives. I decided to study the current issue from the teachers’ perspectives for two primary reasons: teachers’ undeniable influence on students and the influential social status of teachers in China.

Many studies have shown that teachers’ value orientations have a great impact on teaching. Banks (1993) argued that knowledge is not constructed value-free, nor is it taught in a value-free manner. Teachers shape, construct, and interpret knowledge differently based on their philosophical beliefs, social and cultural experiences, and educational backgrounds. In other words, a teacher’s values influence how knowledge is analyzed, instructed and delivered in class (Tetreault, 1993). Researchers found that teachers prepare the curriculum and set it up according to their value orientations (Ennis, Mueller, & Hooper, 1990; Ennis & Zhu, 1991). Teachers were also found to use different teaching approaches based on their value priorities (Chen & Ennis, 1996). Furthermore, teachers with different value orientations were found to have different expectations for students (Ennis, Chen, & Ross, 1992). Given the influences teachers have on students, it is central to recognize and identify their values and beliefs.

Given teachers' highly-respected social status in Chinese culture, it is important to understand teachers' influence. Teachers have always been highly respected in Chinese culture, as these popular sayings attest: "One day's teacher, a life-time parent," "Parents give bones and flesh, teachers give the soul," and "Under the sun, there is no other profession as sacred as that of a teacher."

The respect for teachers has a long history in China and can be traced back thousands of years. According to Confucianism, there were five things to be honored in the world: the heaven, the earth, the emperor, one's parents, and the teacher. As Sun Zi (313-238 B.C.), a follower of Confucius explained,

If a man is without a teacher, then if he is smart, he will be a troublemaker; if he is brave, he will inevitably be a robber. . . . But if he has a teacher, then if he is smart, he will accomplish whatever he undertakes to do; if he is brave, he will become a general. Thus a teacher is the most important treasure a man can have; not having a teacher is the greatest misfortune. The man who does not have a teacher exalts his original nature while he who has a teacher becomes self-cultivated. (Creel, 1953, pp. 105-106)

This high respect for teachers lasted throughout Chinese history, except during the Cultural Revolution (1967-1976). During that 10-year period, most schools were closed and teachers were persecuted, sent to remote villages as laborers, or even killed. After the Cultural Revolution, the teachers' status was reestablished. In 1985, the National Congress of the People's Republic of China passed a bill to name September 10<sup>th</sup> as a national holiday—The Teachers' Day—to honor teachers. Teachers' opinions are highly respected by parents and society in contemporary China. In Chinese society, teachers play as important a role in children's development as the parents, if not more. Teachers' unique and influential social status in China is another reason for me to study teachers' values.

### **The Limitations of the Study**

I am interested in how culture, particularly Chinese culture has changed, although it is not within the scope of this particular study to examine the changes directly. I limit my inquiry to the domain of teachers' values in contemporary China through the methods of observation, interview, and survey. Due to the fact that this study is done in a moderately-developed and middle-sized city in Northeast China, I do not assume that the participants in this study are representative of teachers everywhere in China, nor can the results be generalized to the entire population. I do believe, however, that my findings can be useful as indicators to project a larger picture of the changes of Chinese teachers' cultural beliefs about a "good child". Even though the inferences of this study will be tentative, I hope, in the long run, this study will be valuable to other researchers who are interested in the same topic and can be used as a benchmark to compare subsequent studies of the same kind.

### **Significance of the Study**

Through this study, I seek to understand changes in the Chinese belief system and to identify the salient values in contemporary Chinese teachers' cultural beliefs about a "good child". In general, this study helps develop an understanding of how Chinese culture has changed, what is valued in Chinese culture now, and why.

To the best of my knowledge, this is the one of first empirical studies to examine the change of Chinese culture from kindergarten teachers' perspectives. There have been a few studies on Chinese parents' childrearing values, but little from the teacher's perspective. In a study done in China, school was found to be the most influential factor in children's moral development during the school years (Lew, 1998). Since teachers are

a critical part of school, it is important to study teachers' moral values in school settings. Furthermore, I believe that teachers' beliefs influence not only their behavior in educating children (Bronfenbrenner, 1958; Kohn, 1969) but also children's destination in society (Mortimer, 1974; Rossi & Rossi 1991). What teachers value in children reflects what is valued in the prevailing belief system in Chinese culture.

This study can be valuable to educators, parents, and administrators, providing them with the opportunity to reexamine and reevaluate their own perspectives. It is not unusual that teachers are not fully aware of their own beliefs and standards and how their values influence their pedagogy (Ennis, Mueller, & Hooper, 1990; Ennis & Zhu, 1991). This study can help Chinese teachers as well as non-Chinese teachers reexamine their beliefs and value.

Last but not least, one value of this study may lie in helping non-Chinese educators and scholars understand Chinese culture. Today, given the impact of globalization, understanding other cultures becomes more and more necessary, especially in the case of China because of its rising position in the world. I study Chinese culture not simply because it is my home country, but also because China comprises the world's largest population and has traditionally represented (and deeply influenced) what is known collectively as "the East." This study aims to provide access to ongoing changes in Chinese early schooling.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter aims to provide a theoretical base for the current study by reviewing literature at the macro and micro level. On macro level, given the central question that I raise in this study is that with changes in Chinese culture to what extent the traditional Chinese values still holding the education of young children, the first part of this chapter is rooted in five areas of literature: (a) definitions of culture, (b) Chinese traditional culture, (c) forces for changes in culture, (d) Chinese contemporary culture, and (e) education reforms in China. On micro level, this study specifically aims to examine how Chinese teachers' moral values have changed as Chinese culture changes and to what extent. The second part of this chapter intends to address the research question by reviewing the related empirical research on Chinese moral values in general, from children's perspectives, from parents' perspectives, and most importantly from teachers' perspectives.

#### **Definitions of Culture**

Various definitions and conceptions of culture can be formed in the literature. In a review, Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952), found 164 different definitions of culture in the literature. They found that culture has several key characteristics: "Culture is a product; is historical; includes ideas, patterns, and values; is selective; is learned; is based upon symbols; and is an abstraction from behavior and the products of behavior" (p. 157).

Culture can be interpreted as "a system of artifacts" (Cole, 1998), which implies that culture comes into being where people engage in a joint activity over a period of time such as the "microcultures" of each school. Culture can act as a "guide," showing a set of

procedures needed for communication, solving problems encountered in life, and other areas of life (Hatano & Inagaki, 1992). Culture is like a “toolkit” of techniques and procedures for understanding and managing your world (Bruner, 2001). Culture is also daily life. “Its truth resides not in explicit formulations of the rituals of daily life but in the daily practices of person who in acting take for granted an account of who they are and how to understand their fellows’ moves ” (Bruner, 1987, p. 90).

Giddens (1989) defines culture as “the whole way of life of the members of a society” (p. 31). It includes “the values the members of a given group hold, the norms they follow, and the material goods they create” (p. 31). Chu (1979 & 1985) also refers culture to “a way of life” that is shared by “the majority members of a cultural group.” In this conception, culture is constructed as the commonalities in beliefs, value orientations, and symbols of communication that are shared by most of its members. In these conceptions of culture, value plays a crucial role in defining a culture.

Another definition that also echoes this view is that culture is a moral community (Shweder, 1990).

It is a morally enforceable conceptual scheme composed of values (desirable goals) and causal beliefs (including ideas about means-ends connections) that is exemplified or instantiated in practice. Members of a culture are members of a moral community who work to co-construct a shared reality and who act as though they were parties to an agreement to behave rationally within the terms of the realities they share. (p. 20)

This definition is most meaningful to the present study. Based on this definition, the core of each culture is always about what is considered to be good and desirable by members of the culture and what is not (Shweder, 1990). Culture has distinct value systems and orientations (Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck, 1961). Understanding culture requires examining and identifying the “core values” of that culture. For example, many

would agree independence can be regarded as one of the core values in Western culture while interdependence is core to Eastern cultures (Kitayama & Markus, 1994, 1995; Kondo, 1990).

While recognizing and understanding the core values of different cultures is important, it is also crucial to be aware that culture is not a static set of value systems. Culture is constantly changing and evolving, especially in contemporary society. In today's world, every culture is open to influences from, and spreads its own influences to, other cultures such as western influences on China (Hamelink, 1983). Culture also changes due to the changes within individual members of the society and changes in the composition of the society, for example, old members die off and new members (with different values) enter (Chaffee & Chu, 1992).

As Bruner (2001) explains,

It is no longer a very useful fiction to conceive of "a culture" as an established, almost irreversibly stabilized way of thinking, believing, acting, judging. Cultures have always been in the process of change, and the rate of change becomes greater as our fates become increasingly intermingled through migration, trade, and the rapid exchange of information. (p. 97)

Culture is not static but dynamic like a constantly flowing current. Cultural change is better described as a gradual evolutionary process (Pan, 1984). For the present study, I will examine the "core values" of Chinese culture and how they evolved through history.

### **Traditional Chinese Culture: Collectivity**

If one were to summarize the crux of traditional Chinese culture in one word, that word would be "collectivism." China has a long history of collective culture. From a historical perspective, collectivism emerged in the first stages of Chinese civilization.



According to historian Hou Wailu, China followed the “oriental pattern” type of social system, wherein the nation develops from clans, but stays in clans (Hou, 1957, pp. 6-12). In this type of clan social system, an individual belongs to the clan that he/she is born into, and is charged with obligations and duties of all members in the clan from birth. People depended on the harmony inherent in a clan and, therefore, an individual’s obligations to the clan are highly valued. The individual is simply regarded as a member of the clan.

Although ancient China went through many dynasties, the nature of the social system remained rather stable, and collectivism was and still is at the heart of this system. Within the system, each person was regarded as part of the family instead of an independent individual. Obedience and conformity to the family and society were highly valued, whereas individuality was perceived as contradictory to one’s duties and responsibilities to others (Glassman, 1991). Individuality was considered as a threat to the established order of family and society and was strongly discouraged.

Even after the communist victory in 1949, the government of the People's Republic of China still focused on the collective nature of social relations more than any other aspect of Chinese life. Collectivism was not only reflected in the family, but also in the form of the “work family” (also known as the work unit) (Shaw, 1998). During the period of the planned economy, people were assigned to work in units. Most Chinese people worked in one enterprise for their whole lives and viewed the enterprise as their home. Moreover, workers depended on such enterprises for their permanent employment, free housing, free medical care, and other fringe benefits. These work units became part of their identities.

The philosophical roots of collectivism can be traced back to three prominent religions and philosophies in China: Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism. Confucianism has influenced Chinese culture for over two thousand years. Traditional Chinese culture can be considered to be built upon the value system crystallized in Confucianism (Tu, 1985). According to Confucianism, an individual's identity is directly related to his family or group, which is the essence of collectivism. One of the primary emphases of Confucianism is on harmony in human society (Hsu, 1981; Tu, 1991). A human being only exists in relation to others, and the success of an individual depends on the harmony and strength of the group.

Buddhism, as *the* prominent religion in China, promotes collectivism in Chinese culture as well. In Chinese Buddhist thinking and practice, the human ego is perceived as just as an illusion, and therefore, the self is not valued. Chinese Buddhism teaches that people should free themselves from personal desires and interests in order to reach the ultimate goal—"enlightenment" (Kieschnick, 2003). A person must think less of himself/herself and more of the world. Taoism, another prominent religion in Chinese culture, also facilitated the development of collectivism in Chinese culture. Taoism believes that all things are fundamentally one. Everything in the universe is just an element of "the whole" and is connected (Zhou, 2002). Taoist beliefs placed great emphasis on inner peace and harmony in society. In summary, Confucianism, Chinese Buddhism, and Taoism emphasize the importance of harmony in society. An individual is perceived as part of a group or society and exists for the benefit of that group or society. These philosophies have constituted a strong basis for the formation of the collective culture of China over the past two thousand years.

Given the recent social changes in the past few decades, however, Chinese culture has changed and continues to change. Individualism has found a place in Chinese culture, inevitably challenging the nature of the collective culture in China.

### **Forces for Change in Cultural Values**

With the advent of a socialist market economy and the “open-up” policy in 1978, China has undergone dramatic economic and political changes. To understand the change in Chinese culture during the past few decades, the contemporary forces that caused this change must be examined. Three major forces have contributed to the development of individualism in the Chinese society.

The first and foremost force is the launch of the market economy in China in 1978. The Market economy has grown in China dramatically since 80s. Today, the Chinese government no longer controls the economy. Private enterprises are emerging, and the market competition has become the norm (Glassman, 1991; Zhou, 2002). The very nature of the market economy conditions and promotes personal achievement and personal wealth, which inevitably promotes the development of individualism. The changes in economy also have caused changes in Chinese political system (Qi & Tang, 2004). China is no longer a purely socialist country. It has special administrative regions, such as Hong Kong and Macau. The Chinese government is in the process of undertaking political adjustments and reforms, while also perfecting its legal system (Wang, 2002). Generally, contemporary China is developing toward a more open, democratic, and diverse society, which provides opportunities and space for individualism to grow.

The second force is the one-child policy inaugurated in the late 1970s, which allows only one child per family (Qi & Tang, 2004). When only one child is allowed per

family, the child becomes the center of the family and often receives unconditional love from both parents and grandparents. An overview of research on the only-child has shown that growing up in such an environment, the child tends to become self-centered and less considerate of the other people (Feng, 2002). Thus, the one-child policy has provided the necessary conditions for the child to develop individuality.

The third force is globalization and western influence, which has brought about an increasing number of cultural exchanges between China and the Western countries (Hayhoe, 1984; Wang, 2003). These cultural exchanges are also visible in schooling, as an increasing number of Chinese students overseas bring back to China a significant number of Western ideas and values, as well as Western science and technology. Large numbers of Western intellectuals, businessmen, and educators are now coming to China, bringing along their perceptions and worldviews (Li, 1999).

In addition, the recent impact of mass media and the Internet allow people to access information and concepts from other parts of the world, thus enlarging horizons for both consumerism and individualism. The development of individualism has already affected Chinese people's conception of values and ways of behavior, causing moral confusion and a tension with traditional collectivism in contemporary Chinese culture (Qi & Tang, 2004).

### **Contemporary Chinese Culture**

Contemporary Chinese culture is full of tensions between individualism and collectivism. The two most significant contemporary tensions in the Chinese society are (a) the tension between the open market economy and the one party dominant political system, and (b) the tension between the younger and the older generation.

As I explained previously, the market economy promotes personal achievement and personal wealth. The success of the individual is no longer dependent on the harmony and strength of the group, as both Confucianism and collectivism led most Chinese people to believe (Fouts & Chen, 1995). The market economy values the ownership of individual work, thus promoting self-centered and self-asserting values. In order to succeed, people must have qualities that are valued by the market economy, such as independence, individuality, critical thinking, and personal freedom (Hooks, 1994; Zhou, 2002). Yet, the political system in China has not changed fundamentally. The government is still run by one dominant party—the Communist Party—and the Chinese government’s plan to separate the legal system from the Party has not been implemented yet (Shaw, 1998). The Communist Party still has absolute control over fields such as law, education, and media. The Party still promotes its political and ideological concepts through media and education. The Party uses the medium of education to produce people who are models with certain kinds of behaviors and qualities with specific uses for a socialist/communist country—namely, people who respect authority, follow rules, and fulfill obligations (Glassman, 1991). Inevitably, what the Chinese political system promotes—collectivism—and what the market economy conditions and needs—individualism— clash, producing a lot of tensions and confusion in Chinese society.

Another contemporary tension is revealed by the conflicting values between the older and younger generations. The older generation, who grew up before the 1980s (the launch of the market economy), still holds strong traditional Chinese values. This generation believes in collectivism and Communism and the importance of maintaining a harmonious relation within the group/society; to that end, they believe individuals have to

sacrifice for the benefit of the group/society when it is necessary (Shaw, 1998). They also value conformity, obedience, selflessness, honesty, hard work, tolerance, and forgiveness in people (Reed, 1995). At the other end of the spectrum, the younger generation, who grew up in the 1980s and after, experienced the market economy and the rapid social changes this brought about in China. This generation did not experience the flourishing of communism in China, intensive political education, or the planned economy the previous generations had. What they value, to a great extent, is what the market economy itself values—individualism (Turner, 2002). In addition, many of the younger generation have had the opportunity to study abroad and become acquainted with Western philosophies and education. With the proliferation of the World Wide Web, students have now access to information and receive education from all over the world without having to physically go anywhere. They are attracted to Western culture and are greatly influenced by Western ideology and values (Zhu, 2002). There is an unavoidable disagreement between the younger and the older generation vis-à-vis value judgments and hierarchies: what is good, what is desirable, what is acceptable, what is not acceptable, and so on.

### **Education Reform in China**

In order to respond to the challenges of social changes in contemporary China, especially those inherent to the advent of a market economy, the Chinese government and the Communist Party of China have implemented several education reforms. The most influential education reform is the basic curriculum reform in primary schools, which started in 1999 (Li, 2001). In this section, I will first offer a brief description of the 1999 curriculum reform. Then I will discuss the new policies and changes triggered by this education reform, while explaining how individualism is addressed to children in the

current curriculum and teaching. In the last sub-section, I will discuss the issues that have been brought by this education reform.

This curriculum reform contained new policies in “deyu” (moral education), especially to address issues such as individualism, moral confusion, and other challenges that young children have to face in contemporary China. It should be noted that “deyu” is usually roughly translated as “moral education” in English, for lack of a better, more poignant existing term (Li et al., 2004). In Chinese, “de” means “morality” and “yu” means education. “Deyu” is an umbrella concept that refers to education in ideology, morality, mental health, politics, law and so on. Deyu is a course, in simple words, to teach students what is right and what is wrong.

The proposed new policies include (a) proposals for reinforcing and improving primary school Moral Education (CPC & State Council, 2000); (b) proposals for improving the ethical, ideological, and moral standards of children and young people across the country (CPC & SC, 2004); (c) implementation outlines to carry out and cultivate national spirit in primary schools (CPC & PRC Ministry of Education, 2004; and (d) Rules for primary students (PRCMOE, 2004).

These new policies addressed the absence of many concepts central to individualism and Western philosophies, such as individuality, critical thinking, human rights, personal freedoms, independence, and so on. Previously moral education paid exclusive attention to the obligations of the individual for the good of the state and society (Lee, 2001; Reed, 1995, 1996). The old educational system held that individuals should be selfless and loyal, willing to serve the People and the Party, even to the extent

of sacrificing their life in the line of duty. The rights and needs of individuals were not addressed in these educational policies.

The goal of moral education for early childhood and elementary school in China was to educate children and model their behavior in such a way that it could meet the “moral needs” of the country and society at the time (Reed, 1995, 1996). The teaching and learning methods were about requiring children to remember moral rules and codes and compelling them to obey literally instead of developing their own thinking, values, beliefs, and behavior (Lee, 2001; Li, 2000). Through this education reform new values—such as individualism—are introduced to children in a different light. More specifically, individualism is no longer considered as a negative concept. The current moral education, in general, not only stresses the individual’s obligations for the society, but it also addresses the individual’s needs, while introducing the notion of the individual’s rights (Li et al., 2004; Lu & Gao, 2004). Although the current model of moral education still advocates the pursuit of noble communist ideals in principle, it primarily emphasizes the practical moral code, such as the need for honesty and respect for others.

The primary task of the current moral education system for early childhood and elementary level schools is to guide children through moral dilemmas and confusions in life and help them develop moral characteristics that are essential to both the development of contemporary Chinese society and the development of a mentally-healthy human being. The new curricula in moral education follow the basic principles brought up by Lu: “The foundation of moral education should be the individual’s understandings of the world and people” (2002b, p.1). Instead of asking children to memorize the norms and rules they must obey, the current approach in moral education aims at helping



children form basic ideas about right and wrong and to develop abilities to form their own judgment and analyze situations through critical thinking.

These new policies place children's individual development at the heart of the reform and respects their interests and choices (Lu & Gao, 2004). For instance, the New Guidelines for Moral Character and Life in Compulsory Education in China suggest that the goal and content of the moral education curriculum should be based on four values and dimensions: (a) living a healthy and safe life; (b) living a happy and positive life; (c) living a responsible and caring life; and (d) living an intelligent and creative life (PRCMOE, 2002a). According to this policy, children's needs should balance both freedom and responsibility, and children should be encouraged to deal with moral dilemmas and conflicts in real life. The policy recommends that the school, family, and society cooperate closely in the children's moral development.

The course "Moral Character and Society" offers an example to elaborate on the above thesis. The course "Moral Character and Life" is taught in Grades 3 through 6. For Grades 1 and 2, there is a pre-course, "Moral Character and Life," a 40-minute class taught twice a week. For Grades 3 and 4, the course "Moral Character and Society" is a 40-minute class, taught twice a week. For Grades 5 and 6, this course is taught three times a week. The tables of contents for the curriculum are listed below: (the curriculum example below is provided and translated by Lu & Gao, 2004)

Grade Three: I'm Growing;

1. My classmates and I;
2. I want to grow up safely;
3. My growth and my family;

4. My life with the neighbors;
5. My growth and the school;
6. My growth and others
7. My home town nurtures me

#### Grade Four: My Roles

1. We are together;
2. Growing is not painful;
3. I'm a consumer (both of industry and agriculture);
4. What can I do for you?;
5. My home town is changing;
6. My contact with the outside world (traffic, communications, media and the Internet).

#### Grade Five: I'm a Modern Adolescent (I)

1. Who am I?;
2. I can get along with others;
3. I'm the leader of my class;
4. We are all the descendants of the first emperor of Yan and Huang;
5. Every family has its own problems;
6. My rights and responsibilities;
7. Emerge from past history;

#### Grade Six: I'm a Modern Adolescent (II)

1. New problems in my growing up;
2. I'm growing together with my motherland;

3. What about the outside world?;
4. We are living in a global village;
5. The earth is sick;
6. There are really many problems in the world;
7. A new life will soon begin.

As the lists above indicate, the current curriculum addresses the issues that concern children and their lives, such as growing up, friendship, personal safety, and family life. This curriculum aims at helping children to look at those issues critically and positively (a case in point is “Every family has its own problems”). It also introduces new concepts that have come into China because of the market economy and the recent social changes in China, such as consumerism, personal rights, and personal identity. At the same time, it still maintains some traditional Chinese values and promotes the idea of collectivism, engrained in the responsibilities for family and the society.

While the current education system allows children to develop their individuality in general, I believe that the meaning of “individuality” is still limited and remains under-defined. The individuality that the current education promotes is confined to the norms of Chinese collectivism and, inevitably, has collective features (Liu, 2004). In school, children can construct their own individuality but, when their individuality contradicts the traditional Chinese collective values (such as responsibility, kindness, tolerance, and cooperation/collaboration), and especially when their individuality challenges the interest of the group, the teacher will intervene. Individuality is not encouraged when it contradicts group integrity or group interest, and the group is always valued more than each individual (Liu, 2004). At the same time, even though the current curriculum

appears to encourage the children's development of individuality, ultimately I suspect only a certain kind of individuality is valued—one that can be beneficial to both individual and the group—whereas the kind of individuality that may focus more on the individual (to the disadvantage of group interest) is still discouraged.

In conclusion, the current curriculum after the 1999 reform introduces the concept of individualism to children as a neutral, even positive term. More importantly, the current curriculum acknowledges and respects children as individuals instead of just members of a group. It also encourages teachers to help children think critically and develop independently. To some extent these changes allow children to construct their own individuality. Yet, at the same time, children learn to know that they cannot put their own individuality above group integrity and interest. They still have responsibilities and obligations for the group and society. The current study aims to explore the meaning of individuality in a collective culture from teachers' perspectives and to what extent individuality can be encouraged or has to be compromised.

### **Empirical Research Related to Chinese Moral Values**

During the past few decades, a considerable amount of research has examined Chinese culture, as well as Sino-US comparative studies. In this section, I examine only empirical research that is closely related to the present research issue—Chinese moral values. It should be noted that I found that there are very few empirical studies done by Chinese scholars, educators, or researchers within China, due to the lack of empirical research in education in China in general. Most empirical research discussed here was done by American researchers or Chinese researchers overseas.

It is found generally that most East Asian regard the self as interdependent with others within the social context (Kitayama & Markus, 1991, 1994). It is especially true in the case of Chinese culture. Much research shows that the Chinese are socially oriented (Ando, 1965; Forster, 1936), and the Chinese can be characterized as concerned with social harmony, interpersonal relationships and the collective good (Hofstede, 1983). The following body of research verifies that conformity, obedience, respect, hard work, patriotism, selflessness are highly valued in parenting, childrearing, schooling and other aspects of Chinese culture.

Forster (1936) examined American and Chinese culture through observation and interpretation of cultural artifacts. He summarized that family harmony, the individual's duties to the group (e.g., children's duties to their parents), and respect for the old and the aged were emphasized in Chinese culture. Using similar instruments and methodology, Hsu (1972), a Western-trained Chinese scholar, also indicated in her study that the Chinese way of life was centered on a set of values defined in Confucian doctrine, including loyalty to family, fidelity, and submission to authority. This characterization echoes those of many other Chinese scholars' findings (e.g., Pang, 1988; Su & Wang, 1988).

Solomon (1965) studied the change of educational themes in China by examining school textbooks approved by the early republican government of 1922 and by the People's Republic of China in 1960. The comparisons show that conformity and loyalty were consistently and highly valued in textbooks over four decades, even though the primary responsibility shifted from loyalty to family to loyalty to the Communist Party. In 1990, Meyer also analyzed textbooks moral and educational themes in Chinese

schools. Meyer's findings showed that patriotism, selflessness and school virtue were highly emphasized in the textbooks, echoing earlier findings of Solomon.

Lew (1998) studied Chinese values in parenting, schooling, morality, and personality. The findings were that the majority of educated Chinese deemphasize individuality and are hesitant to display individuality or differences from peers. Being responsible, sincere and faithful were found to be the most preferred personality characteristics across all the age groups. Being sociable, a person consistent in word and deed, independent, and respectful were also considered to be desirable traits. Yet, some traditional Chinese values such as tolerance, being trustful, forgiving and considering the group first were no longer considered to be of special importance in this study.

Lew's (1998) study is not the only one that suggested a change in Chinese cultural values. Many researchers seem to agree that Chinese culture is changing (Pan et al., 1994; Slotboom et al., 1998; Xiao, 2001). Characteristics valued in traditional Chinese culture such as obedience, submission to authority, conformity, and so on, were no longer highly valued in contemporary Chinese culture,

Pan et al.'s (1994) comparative study of Chinese and American cultural values found obedience (especially towards superiors and authority) to be rated significantly higher by U.S respondents than Chinese respondents. The fact that the survey was conducted in Shanghai could be one reason for the low rating of obedience by Chinese respondents. Shanghai, as an international city and the center of Chinese economy, is the most open and Westernized city in China. It has the largest population of people going and coming from abroad in China. Some Chinese traditional values may well be

compromised in this particular mixed-culture city. Nevertheless, I think this finding reflects a trend as Chinese people began to reevaluate some traditional values.

### **Chinese Moral Values—Children's Perspective**

Chinese children have been found to value hard work, respect to authority, social cooperation in many studies. Domino and Hannah (1987) compared social values held by children in China and the United States. Chinese children were found to have a higher degree of social cooperative orientation, concern with authority and moral-ethical rectitude. In a more recent study, Wang and Leichtman (2000) analyzed Chinese and American kindergarten children's narratives to examine children's social engagement, moral code, and emotional expressiveness. Chinese children were found to mention more frequently emotions of both self and others than American children. Wang and Leichtman suggest that Chinese children have been taught to attend more closely to the emotions of others.

Burton (1986) studied Chinese preschools. From observation and interviews with children, he found that certain values were nurtured and reinforced. These values, such as unselfishness, concern for group welfare, respect for labor, and pride in meeting one's obligations, were expressed in children's daily activities as well as their special performances for visitors.

In Feather (1986)'s comparative study of value preferences among students in Australia and China, Chinese students were also found to place more emphasis on collectivist concerns than did Australian students. The findings also showed that the Chinese students placed a higher value on respect, hard work, and self-restraint. More recently, in Yuan and Shen's (1998) comparison study of moral values held by early

adolescents, the ten highest values rated in mainland China in the Chinese Value Survey were patriotism, filial piety, trustworthiness, persistence, hard work, group solidarity, courtesy, sense of righteousness, and sincerity. The two highest-rated instrumental values in the Rokeach Value Survey in mainland China were honesty and being loving.

### **Research on Chinese Moral Values—Parents' Perspective**

Many studies also show that obedience, respect, and hard work are highly valued in childrearing in China. Chen and Uttal (1988)'s cross-cultural study of parents' beliefs found Chinese parents to be more likely than American parents to have higher expectations for their children's educational achievement. Chen and Uttal infer that this is mainly due to the influence of traditional Chinese values that Chinese parents put more emphasis on diligent work.

Lin and Fu (1990) investigated childrearing practices among Chinese, immigrant Chinese, and Caucasian American parents. They analyzed the questionnaire completed by parents of 138 families in Taiwan and the United States. The findings show that parents of Chinese origin, including Chinese and Chinese-American, put more emphasis on children's diligence, independence, and respect for and obedience towards parents. It is worth clarifying that independence in Chinese typically has many meanings. When it is used to describe children, it typically means self-reliance and it emphasizes the ability to take care of oneself such as dressing one self physically, eating by oneself or getting to school by one self.

In Xu, Shen, Wan, Li, Mussen, and Cao (1991)'s study of Chinese family socialization, over two thousand parents of children between the ages of 3 and 6 were asked to rate their children's characteristics. The eight characteristics selected by parents



as most descriptive were curiosity, positive attitudes toward others (tends to help others), self-confidence, independence, self-control, frustration tolerance, and positive attitudes toward work.

In Wu's (1996a) study of Chinese parents' attitudes towards socialization, conducted in Shanghai, a strong emphasis on obedience, loving others, being group oriented, being cooperative, respecting elders, having good manners, and *dongshi* was indicated in the findings. *Dongshi* means that the child is able to understand the expectations of others (mostly his parents or caregivers such as grandparents) and try to meet the expectations. The concept of *dongshi* implies many values embodied in Chinese culture including filial piety, obedience, and unselfishness.

In Xiao's (2001) comparison of childrearing values in the United States and China, the 6 most valued qualities by Chinese parents in order of preference were independence, responsibility, hard work, tolerance/respect, thrift, and good manners.

In Zhang, Kohnstamm, Slotboom, Elphick, and Cheung (2002)'s comparison of Chinese and Dutch parents' descriptions of their children, Chinese parents put great emphasis on characteristics such as being social and outgoing, being helpful and sincere, honesty, being careful, diligence, self-control, and self-confidence in their descriptions. Chinese parents also mentioned the characteristics such as independence and mature for age in their description.

### **Research on Chinese Moral Values—Teachers' Perspective**

There have been very few studies of Chinese teachers' moral values or beliefs about moral education. Tobin, Wu, and Davidson's (1989) comparative study of preschools in three cultures was the first one in my knowledge to shed some light on

Chinese teachers' beliefs about moral education. Tobin et al. found that Chinese teachers believed that moral education is as important as academic education if not more and it is their responsibility to teach children moral values such as caring for others and being unselfish in the classroom. As one teacher in the study expressed, "The most important lessons we teach children, in addition to numbers and reading and writing, are Chinese moral lessons. We teach children how to treat others, how to be friends, how to be citizens, concerned for others, rather than selfish" (p. 109). The concept of collectivism, especially "the unity of a group" (p. 106), was heavily emphasized by teachers and principals. As a Chinese principal explained,

We use the classroom as a big family to teach single children that they are members of a collective. We teach children to develop the habit of treating others equally, to be friendly, considerate, concerned, to mutually give in to others, and to obey the rules of the group. We nourish their concept of collectivism through numerous daily activities . . . the kindergarten is the ideal place to teach children the concept of collectivity. (p. 105)

Tobin et al. also found that teachers greatly valued order in the classroom and expected total obedience from children. The strong emphasis on the group made teachers overlook each child as an individual.

Hadley (2003) also observed that Chinese teachers kept reinforcing the importance of being a good peer-group member and working together as a group throughout language activities in a public kindergarten in Taiwan. In the classroom the children were expected to sit and listen quietly during the class period, which was considered as showing respect to teachers.

Through the observation of 12 Chinese teachers in six classrooms in kindergartens in Nanjing, Liu and Elicker (2005) also found that the most common teacher-initiated interaction with children was to maintain discipline, high control and to

restrain children from doing something out of order. Their study suggested that Chinese kindergarten teachers are more concerned with maintaining the order and control of the classroom than children's psychological needs, problem-solving skills, and creativity. Children were encouraged to accept high control and restraint from teachers and showed high obedience towards the teachers and high dependence on the teachers' authority. As a result, Children may be overly restricted and they might not have opportunities to think creatively or to take initiative to solve problems without direction.

However, that seems to be changing. In Tobin's later study (Tobin, Hsueh, & Karasawa, 2009), he revisited the same preschool as well as one other in China in 2002, 2004 and 2005 and he detected a change in the schools as well as in teachers' perceptions. More child-initiated activities were observed in the classroom. Large group activities that were valued by teachers and frequently used as a primary approach to teach children the unity of group have been greatly decreased or even disappeared. Teachers' perception of large group activities changed as well. They see such activities "affect the development of children's autonomy and self-expression" (p. 72). Teachers also mentioned that they now "see children more as individuals than as a group" than they used to (p. 72).

Wang, Elicker, McMullen, and Mao's (2008) also found that Chinese preschool teachers valued the importance of child-initiated learning (such as being responsive to individual differences or interest and allowing children to do own projects or select own activity). They also found that Chinese teachers valued much more working silently and alone at seatwork, talking to whole group, routine group practice, and using authority than American teachers. And American teachers valued creativity such as writing by

inventing own spelling much more than Chinese teachers. This study indicates that Chinese teachers start to see children as individual and address their individual needs while still holding on to traditional collective values.

Similar change in teachers' perceptions can also be found in Ni (2008) recent study. She examined teachers' narrative evaluations of 450 elementary school students in China. In their narratives, teachers expressed that they value independence, creativity, self-reliance and self-control in children. Other qualities such as being group-oriented, caring for others, unselfishness, helpfulness, honesty, and obedience were also frequently used by the teachers in their evaluations of students. The narrative evaluation showed an interesting mix of values of teachers. On one hand, teachers indicated that they value the individuality in children. On the other hand, they still used criteria such as "fulfilling duty as a member of the class," and "participating collective activity, and putting collective goal prior to individual" to evaluate children.

### **What Not to Do—Another Perspective of Chinese Moral Values**

There are a group of studies on Chinese teachers' perceptions on students' misbehavior. By reviewing what Chinese teachers perceived as most troublesome or tolerable and why, these studies might help contribute to Chinese teachers' moral values from another perspective.

In Ding, Li, Li and Kulm (2008), Chinese teachers perceived students' daydreaming (being inattentive, sitting there and never answering questions) as the most troublesome misbehavior, which suggests an interesting change in teachers' perceptions in contemporary China. Not answering questions or not speaking in class had been considered as acceptable behaviors by Chinese teachers. Asking low quality or even

stupid questions had been considered as wasting others' time as well as "losing face" (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996). In addition, "shyness" (not speaking in public) had been traditionally valued and encouraged in Chinese children (Ho, 1984, 1986; Yang, 1986). Ding et al.'s study could indicate that Chinese teachers no longer value some traditional values as they used to.

Talking out of turn was considered the second most troublesome misbehavior by lower elementary school teachers. Talking out of turn means that students don't listen to teachers or other students; they interrupt teachers and other students with unrelated things to the class; and talking without teachers' permission. Teachers viewing talking out of turn as second most troublesome misbehavior could be an indication of the importance of order in the classroom in teachers' perception.

Shen et al. (2009) also found that talking out of turn was perceived as both troublesome and difficult to tolerate by teachers in their study. They examined teachers' perceptions of classroom behavior problems in five provinces of the People's Republic of China. Over five hundred Chinese teachers from 27 elementary schools participated in the survey. Besides talking out of turn, teachers also considered "non-compliance" (meaning that students are reluctant to comply with the class rules, unwilling to listen to the teacher's directions, and try to defend themselves unreasonably) as one of the least tolerable behavior. The most troublesome behavior ranked by teachers was "uncooperative behavior" (such as refusing to join in the group, play by self, not caring about the group's performance, and not making an effort at group work) was ranked as one of worst behaviors by teachers. The above findings could suggest that Chinese

teachers still value obedience (complying with class rules, listening to teachers' directions) and collectivity (caring about the group, doing group work) very much.

Ho (2004) also found in his study in Hong Kong that Chinese teachers are more likely to accept students who perform poorly in learning than students who are not showing respect for teachers, getting along with peers, and keeping quiet in class. His study could suggest again the importance of traditional values in teachers' perception.

In conclusion, I began this chapter with a theoretical framework for culture studies and literature on Chinese culture, which aimed to explain how Chinese culture has changed in a broad historical and political context and why. The second part of the chapter provided an overview of empirical research on the moral values accepted by Chinese parents, children, and teachers over a period of time.

The research indicated that there has been a change in Chinese teachers' perception of moral values. Chinese teachers seemed to no longer perceive individuality, independent thinking, and creativity in a negative way, while some Chinese traditional values were still valued but have become less important in teachers' perceptions. However, many studies reviewed here have their constraints. Perhaps the greatest constraint is that they seem to fail to give a clear definition or description of each value they measured. The meanings of those values were assumed to be understood by researchers, participants, and readers. Those values can have completely different, even contradictory meanings across different cultures and depending on context. In addition, there are very few empirical studies conducted regarding moral values and moral education in China between 2001 (after the curriculum reform) and now, which is actually a crucial period for China in terms of educational change and economic

development. The present study aims to give an update on Chinese teachers' perceptions of values and explore the meaning of those values in contemporary China.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### **Design of the Research**

This study employs both qualitative and quantitative methods, in order to gain a better understanding of complex phenomena (Greene, Benjamin, & Goodyear, 2001). Observation, interviews, document analysis, and surveys were employed with the hope of providing a complete and insightful account into changes and continuities in teachers' perceptions of moral values and moral education.

The changes happening in Chinese classrooms were examined through observation. The changes arising in Chinese teachers' beliefs were constructed through in-depth interviews, which were further explored and confirmed in a larger sample of teachers through surveys. A sequential five-phase design was employed. The data collected in each phase was used in the planning of the following phase. The interview and survey data were analyzed separately and converging findings noted.

The design of this study, presented in detail below, combined the use of document analysis, observations, interviews, and questionnaires.

**Phase I.** Documents were studied and existing data was reviewed (e.g., curriculum guidelines, textbooks, and teachers' evaluations) primarily to provide supplementary information regarding teachers' values, their teaching practices, and their perceptions of each child in their classrooms.

**Phase II.** With consent, four classrooms at two schools were selected for observations. Each classroom was observed for a period of two weeks. Observations were



primarily used as cues for teachers' interpretations, clarification, and reflections, as well as providing contextual information.

**Phase III.** Eight head teachers in the four selected classrooms were interviewed coinciding with observations in their classrooms. Formal interviews lasted 20 minutes to two hours, and each teacher was interviewed at least four times. The interviews were documented with notes and audiotapes.

**Phase IV.** Based on the themes that appeared in the observations and interviews, as well as in the pilot studies and previous research, a questionnaire was developed and administered to twenty public preschools and kindergartens in a city in North China in February, 2011.

**Phase V.** Final follow-up interviews through phone and email were conducted to further clarify issues and verify the data.

### **Participants**

This research aims to explore teachers' changing values in public preschools and kindergartens in Harbin, China. Harbin is the capital city of Heilongjiang Province, with a population of over 5 million people. It is a fairly typical city in China, and can be considered to representative of most urban areas in China. In addition, Harbin is also my hometown. I have previous knowledge of its early education system and have easy access to most kindergartens. The two public kindergartens (HIT and HFL) I chose to study have been run by the government for over 30 years. They are two of the largest kindergartens in Harbin, well-known for their high quality. Both kindergartens have over 300 children, mostly from the middle- or upper-middle class families. The teachers in

these two kindergartens are well-educated. Most of them are local people who graduated from the Teachers' College in Harbin with an associate's degree in early education.

**Participants for observation and interview.** HIT is a public preschool and kindergarten affiliated with a well-known large university in Harbin. HFL is a public preschool and kindergarten affiliated with a teachers' college from which most of teachers working at HFL graduated. Two 4-year-old classrooms were chosen as my participants for observations based on two criteria: teachers' age and teachers' attitude. To better address my research questions, I wanted to select a range of teachers of different ages. The teachers from these classrooms were born in the 1960s, 1970s, early 1980s, and late 1980s. The teachers held a range of educational degrees: two-year associate degree, three-year associate degree and bachelor's degree. Two of them had formal training in early childhood education while two of them did not have any professional training in early childhood education before they started working as preschool teachers. That the teachers were comfortable with me coming into their classrooms and showed their interest in participating in my study was another criterion for selecting these two classrooms.

I then visited HFL and selected two of their 4-year-old classrooms based on the same criteria. The teachers in these two classrooms at HFL were born in the 1970s, mid 1980s, and late 1980s. They all had majored in early childhood education and graduated from the same teachers' college with either a three-year associate's degree or a four-degree bachelor's degree. These eight head teachers in four classrooms that I observed were also participants for the interviews. I interviewed directors at both schools as well.

Both directors were born in the 1970s and graduated with master's degrees in early childhood education.

**Participants for survey.** The survey was distributed to twenty public preschools and kindergartens, including HFL and HIT, in the five districts within the urban area of Harbin. The eight teachers who were interviewed and whose classes were observed did not take the survey. A total of 349 teachers completed the survey, with ages ranging from 16 to 56, holding a variety of degrees, such as two-year associate's degree, three-year associate's degree, bachelor's degree, and master's degree, and with working experience ranging from one-half year to thirty-nine years. Regarding age, 61 percent of the teachers who took the survey were 20 to 30 years old; 19 percent of the teachers were between 30 years and 40 years old; 15 percent of the teachers were less than 20 years old; and about 5 percent of the were more than 40 years old.

Regarding the highest degree, over 42 percent of the teachers surveyed had three-year associate's degrees; around 34 percent had four-year bachelor's degrees; about 21 percent had two-year associate's degrees; and less than one percent had master's degrees. With regard to working experience, about 44 percent of the participants had no more than 3 years working experience; roughly 30 percent of the teachers had more than 3 to 10 years working experience; and around 25 percent had more than 10 years working experience.

About four percent of the participants were male, while 96 percent were female. Thirty-eight percent of the participants had their own children, while sixty-two percent did not yet have their own children.

## **Document Analysis**

Selected documents and curriculum materials were reviewed primarily to provide information about influences on teachers who participated in the study. The documents I studied were the Chinese Kindergarten Curriculum Guideline issued in 2001 and the curriculum book that the two kindergartens currently use. It clearly stated “teachers should respect children’s individual development and encourage each child to develop their own individuality” (p. 1). It also stated “teachers should acknowledge the individual difference of each child. Teachers should help children develop an appreciation of self and a positive attitude towards themselves. Teachers should encourage and assist children to be independent” (p. 1).

The curriculum that teachers currently use is developed according to the new curriculum guideline issued in 2001. It provides written various class activities that the teacher can do in different areas such as science, language, arts, and general. I found out that many activities in this curriculum book are open-ended and allow flexibility and variety. Activities aim to encourage children to develop their individual thinking, problem solving skills, independence, responsibility, cooperation and collaboration. A sample activity is provided as follows:

### **Activity One: Grouping**

Goal: Develop children’s problem solving skills, collaboration skills, and creativity.

Age: 3-4 years old

Activity Description: Teacher divides children to small groups and gives each group a set of balls with different sizes, colors, and material. Children are asked to find various ways of grouping balls with their pals in the shortest time.

In this activity, there are multiple ways of grouping. Children can group balls according to size, color, or material. Children are encouraged to think creatively and differently, which is huge contrast with “only-one-way-right” traditional curriculum. It also involves

problem solving skills and collaboration skills when children in each group try to convince each other their way of grouping.

### **Observation**

I first visited HIT in May, 2010. I met with their directors and observed five classrooms, including one classroom of 3-year-olds, three classrooms of 4-year-olds, and one classroom of 5-year-olds during my first week, in order to get a general picture of the school and gain an overall understanding of the school atmosphere. I officially started my observations in the classrooms at HIT two weeks later. I observed each classroom for two weeks, from 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. for the first two days, and from 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. for the rest of the days.

I observed each classroom from 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. for the first two days in order to gain a general understanding of the classroom atmosphere as well as daily routines. Starting from the third day, my formal classroom observation hours were from 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 a.m. every day. I called it "formal" because I would take my role as a discreet observer and sit in the back and record what was happening in the classrooms during that time. I was in the classroom in the afternoon as well sometime between 3 p.m. and 5 p.m., during which I was more of a helper in the classroom and I did not take any observation notes with a few exceptions. Depending on the classroom and the activity going on in the classroom, I would help the teacher or play with the children. For example, one of the daily afternoon activities at HIT is math exercise. Children work on their math worksheet and give it to the teacher to check after they are done. I usually helped the teacher with checking the worksheets so children would not wait in long lines. Another example is that I took over a classroom for 30 minutes as a favor and played a

game in English with children while both of the head teachers were called away for a teachers' meeting. In addition to classroom observation, I also observed teachers' meetings, children's singing and speech competitions.

Field notes from observation were used as cues for discussion, clarification, and reflection during the interviews with teachers, as well as providing contextual information.

**Data record construction.** During the first few days of my observation in each classroom, I tried to record every detail about what was happening in the classroom. For the following days of my observation, I focused on scribbling down the events that amazed or puzzled me. They were often the practices that are different from my previous observation in 2006, practices that occurred contrary to my expectation, and practices that stayed the same from my generation.

Most of my observation field notes were written in a fashion Jackson (1990) describes as "contemporaneously with the experience and observations of events of interest" (p. 15, as cited in Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995, p. 18), while some were deferred until hours after school, in which I had to rely on my memory and the pictures I took to reconstruct important events (p. 18). In either case, I tried to keep notes as detailed as possible, keeping in mind what Graue and Walsh (1998) suggested: "Assume you will remember nothing. Always over-annotate at every stage of the research process" (p. 132).

The field notes were recorded mostly in Chinese. The episodes, stories, and events that I intended to share in this dissertation were later translated into English by me. In order to keep the original feeling and maintain accuracy, I left the Chinese side by side

with my English translation of important and complicated terms to reduce problems of de-contextualization and misinterpretation of meaning.

Field notes from observation were used as cues for discussion, clarification, and reflection during the interviews with teachers as well as providing for contextual information.

## **Interviews**

My interviews consisted of three parts: semi-structured formal interview, face-to-face chat, and informal interview. I started formally interviewing teachers on the third day of the observation in every classroom. The interviews happened during children's naptimes and after school hours. I formally interviewed each teacher four times (every other day) when I was observing their classrooms. Interviews were scheduled ahead of time and usually recorded with a digital recorder. They generally lasted 20 to 30 minutes.

The informal chats occurred during recesses, lunch breaks, or on the way to activities outside of the classroom. Chats occurred spontaneously and randomly, sometimes initiated by the teachers and sometimes by me. Some of the chats were unrelated to the study but helped bring me closer to the teachers as well as understand them personally. The chats initiated by me usually happened due to a specific question that I had in response to particular situations. It could be something that really puzzled me or a term that needed further clarification. The chats were not recorded digitally. Chats were also an important means I took to build a rapport with teachers as well as to make sure that I was not misinterpreting the teachers or unconsciously putting words in their mouths. The informal interviews were mostly conducted over the phone at the very last stage of analysis, primarily to confirm the findings as well as to get clarifications.

The interviews with teachers were conducted in "conversing style" (Miller, Wang, Sandel, & Cho, 2002). They usually started with what interested me or puzzled me during class observation and evolved depending on the themes or concepts that came up during the interview. For example, the following is a clean version of excerpts from the first five minutes of my first interview with Ms. Liu, just to provide a sense of the general course of the interview.

I: "I saw Peng cried during the morning session. Could you tell me what happened?"

Liu: "He was just a little sad. I talked to him during recess and he told me that he missed his grandpa. He grew up with his grandpa and his grandpa left a few days ago, so he was still adjusting to that. He cried for quite a few times over the past week."

I: "I see. Could you tell me more about him, just in general? What kind of kid you think he is?"

Liu: "He is a good kid, I would say. He likes to help others. He is caring. He is well behaved and a good listener."

I: "Could you elaborate a little bit more on what you meant by "caring"?"

Liu: "For example, I was having a sore throat the other day. You were there. I was getting over a cold. Peng brought some sort of cough drops from home. When his dad told me that Peng specifically asked his dad to take him to a drugstore because he wanted to buy cough drops for me, when dropping him off yesterday morning. His Dad told him that they had some at home so they did not have to go to drugstore. I was moved. I did not expect a 5-year-old child to be so thoughtful. He always helps out in the classroom as well. Every time he saw me going up the stairs, carrying teaching materials, he offered to take them. I really like him."

I: "You also mentioned that he is a good listener. What do you mean by that and do you consider that as an important quality a child?"

Due to the tendency of redundancy in oral expressions in Chinese, I edited out the teachers' words that have repetitive meanings. All real names were replaced with pseudo names in the word document.



Interviews with teachers were meant not only to provide comments, explanations and interpretations for what happened in the classroom but also to co-construct the meanings of what happened.

**Data analysis.** Analysis of data is a process of making sense. The process of making sense is an ongoing one (Stake, 1995). The analysis of observation and interview data in this study was an ongoing process entailing "the undistracted reading and re-reading of the descriptions with the intent to uncover the meaning for the subject" (Parse, Coyne, & Smith, 1985, p. 19).

In the early stage of this process, I read the field notes from observation and interview numerous times and developed a list of preliminary codes based on the emerging themes. Examples of the preliminary codes are helping, caring, respect for the teacher, expressing one's opinion, working with friends, talking without raising hands, doing chores, creativity, and so forth. The specific segments of data were put under those categories. Both external codes and internal codes were considered, as Graue and Walsh (1998) explained, "External codes, which can be seen as codes that come out of theoretical and conceptual perspectives brought to the project, and internal codes, which are issues that come up within your reading of the data" (p. 163).

New codes were then developed and existing codes were revised as I categorized the ongoing data into these themes. I kept repeating this procedure with new data coming in. In the later stage, categories were combined and reduced to a smaller number of higher-level categories (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For example, among the categories under Individuality, I originally had two separate categories: expressing one's opinion

and performing. As the coding proceeded, these two categories were combined and created a broader category called “self-expression.”

## **Survey**

A questionnaire was developed based on the previous research literature, the findings from previous pilot studies I did in 2004 and 2007, and mostly based on the preliminary analysis of the interviews and observations from the current studies.

This questionnaire is meant to generate findings from a larger population of teachers in Harbin. Eight teachers (who were also participants of the interviews and observations at the subject schools) were asked to go through the questionnaire with me and identify any confusing wording or incomprehensible items on the questionnaire. The questionnaire was revised based on their responses and comments. The two directors were also consulted. These eight teachers and two directors, however, did not participate in the survey.

The revised questionnaires were distributed to twenty public preschools and kindergartens in Harbin with the help of a former colleague in February, 2011. The questionnaire was delivered directly to the principal’s office in individual envelopes at each school, and the principal distributed the questionnaire to teachers at her school. The teachers then returned the questionnaires in sealed envelopes to the principal by the end of the day. My colleague collected all the questionnaires from the principal at each school. Four hundred questionnaires were distributed and three hundred and forty five questionnaires were collected.

The questionnaire was composed of three parts: 30 seven-point Likert-scale questions, one rank question, and eight demographic questions. The Likert scale

questions aimed to gain a understanding of teachers’ perceptions of what constitutes a good child, as well as further explore and confirm the findings from the interviews and observations in the current study.

The 30 items were developed based on eight constructs: individuality, independence, optimism, collaboration, collectivity, responsibility, honesty and obedience (conformity). Sample items of the construct of optimism are shown in the table below.

Table 3.1. Optimism Scale

Item No.	Item Content
3	A good child should be optimistic when encountering problems.
4	A good child should have a positive view of others.
11	A good child should have a positive self-perception.
21	A good child should be enthusiastic towards life.

The teachers were asked to rate these items from 1 “strongly disagree” to 7 “strongly agree”. The rank question contains a list of ten attributes: individuality, obedience, responsibility, independence, honesty, conformity (discipline), collaboration, collectivity, optimism, and compassion. The teachers were asked to rank these ten attributes with a numeric code from 1 to 10 corresponding to the levels of the importance in their beliefs from “the most important quality” to “the least important quality,” respectively. The third part contains eight questions about the teachers’ demographics, such as age, education level, working experience, gender, whether they have children,

professional development, the frequency of use of the internet, and the frequency of their reading.

**Data analysis.** There are 127 missing values on the Likert scale items (including 9,870 values). Little's Missing Completely At Random (MCAR) test was performed on the missing data, and the Expectation-Maximization (EM) algorithm was used to replace the missing data with imputed values (Schafer, 1997, 1999; Schafer & Olsen, 1998).

Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used for analysis, with the utilization of the computer software SPSS 21. The descriptive statistical methods were employed to summarize the results from the questionnaire to gain an overall understanding of teachers' perceptions. The descriptive statistics included means, standard deviations, and frequency distributions.

Spearman's rho tests were performed to examine the relationships between teachers' ratings and rankings with the three of their demographical variables (degree, generation, and working experience). A series of Kruskal-Wallis Tests was performed to further explore the patterns in teachers' ratings and rankings based on their demographical variables.

### **Member Checking**

Member checking was done throughout the study. At the beginning of each interview (starting from the second interview), I usually would spend a couple of minutes to recap the key points that the teacher brought up during the previous interview, to keep accuracy and consistency of the data. Once I concluded all the interviews, I transcribed the data and summarized each teacher's responses and gave the summarized transcripts to the teacher for confirmation and further clarification.

To assure the fidelity of the translations from Chinese to English, I consulted with two Chinese graduates of the College of Education at University of Illinois, as well as one American graduate who had studied Chinese and had been to China, to verify the translation and find the closest translation for each term and its meaning.

### **Data Triangulation**

Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used in this study, primarily for the purpose of triangulation and complementarity (Greene, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989). Denzin suggested three ways of triangulating: using many data sources, using different investigators, and using multiple methods (as cited in Graue & Walsh, 1998). In this study, I used multiple ways of generating data. I employed both observation and interview to generate the qualitative data. I substantiated the interpretation from classroom observation with teacher interviews and vice versa to make sure of the consistency and accuracy of my interpretation. There are also two different measurements in the survey (Likert scale questions and rank question), which helped me measure different aspects of the research questions but also to confirm the findings from both sets of data. For example, the findings consistently showed that there is a statistically significant relationship between some attributes and teachers' age, degree, and working experience.

Complementarity refers to seeking elaboration of the results from one method with the results from another method (Greene, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989). Complementarity increases the meaningfulness and clarity of inferences by using methods that explore different facets of the same phenomenon. For example, in this study, the findings from the survey indicated that the teachers from the 90s generation

tended to highly value obedience, which is contradictory to the literature, the findings from interviews, and my expectations. I followed up this issue with both an experienced teacher and a young teacher to further explore the reasons that caused this apparent contradiction.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS FROM OBSERVATIONS AND INTERVIEWS, PART I

Preschools are where culture is reproduced in a new generation of children (Tobin, 2009). Through this study, I hoped to understand continuity and change in Chinese culture from Chinese preschool and kindergarten teachers' perspectives: What has changed in their values and what has stayed the same and why.

In this chapter, I hope to identify what Chinese teachers valued in a child, unfold the meanings of their values through their practice, and reveal what has changed in their values and the assumptions underlying their practice. I strive to portray how change and continuity in their values were constrained by changes in Chinese culture, in the attempt to “combine close analysis of the fine details of behavior and meaning in everyday social interaction with analysis of the wider societal context—the field of broader social influences—within which the face-to-face interaction takes place” (Erickson, 1986, p. 120).

The findings from both observation and interview are presented in this chapter. I instantiate my interpretations with vignettes from classroom episodes I observed and excerpts from interviews. As Denzin (1997) stated, “Stories should show not tell” (p. 40). I hope that readers will be able to see the scenes and hear the conversations and even interpret on their own through my descriptions. I hope that my interpretations “represent the truth and voice” of these teachers (Bresler, 1997, p. 19).

In this chapter, the descriptions of both schools, the sketches of a typical day of classrooms are provided as well as teachers' profiles, including the reasons why they became teachers.

## **HIT School**

HIT preschool (You'eryuan) was founded in 1950, located on the main campus of HIT. It is in a three-story building surrounded by the playground, covering the area of approximately 4600M. There are 25 classrooms from nursery school to kindergarten. The school has 360 children enrolled, with 36 teachers and 24 staff. About 50 percent of the teachers hold an associate's degree in early childhood education and 30 percent hold a bachelor's degree in early childhood education. Another ten percent hold a bachelor's degree in other majors such as music performance, and about ten percent hold an associate's degree in other majors. These teachers usually have over ten years of preschool working experience. Inside the school, there is a music room, a computer room, a piano room, and a multimedia room. It features both Montessori Education and English language education. Throughout the years, it has won many local and national awards for its high quality of education. HIT preschool was originally established to take care of children while their parents were working at the university. Even now, over 95 percent of students are children of faculty and staff of HIT. Only when there are not enough students enrolled from the university, will it open the enrollment to families which are not associated with the university. This does not happen often. For example, in 2010, there were four spots left, so they enrolled four children from outside of the university. The teachers and staff are not associated with the university in any way.

There are two directors at the school. The director (Director Li) is associated with the Communist Party and came directly from the university. She had no experience in early childhood education before she was assigned to this position about 10 years ago. She could be assigned to another position by the party. Her primary job is to keep the



school running in the right political direction as well as keep the teachers and staff on the right political track. The associate director (Director Yu) graduated from Northeast Normal University (the best normal university in the north of China) with a master's degree in early childhood education. She worked for about 10 years in the preschool before pursuing her master's degree. She is primarily in charge of the curriculum planning, teachers' meetings, and other academic activities.

### **HFL School**

HFL preschool (You'eryuan) was founded in 1984. It is in a three-story building, covering the area of 2180M. It has 13 classrooms from nursery school to kindergarten and 365 children. It has around 50 faculty and staff. All the teachers hold a bachelor's degree from early childhood education. It features Montessori Education, and English Education, as well as math, music, and performance. It is the preschool directly associated with Harbin Preschool/Kindergarten Teacher's College which was founded in 1952 and whose graduates have been working as teachers in most preschools in Harbin and Heilongjiang Province. Almost all the teachers were top graduates from Harbin Preschool Teacher's College. The students are mostly from middle class families because of the location of the school, the tuition of the school, as well as the careful selection of the school. The school has received numerous awards for producing high quality of education.

The school has only one director who had 15 years' working experience in preschools and is in the process of pursuing a master's degree in early childhood education.

Mission Statement of this school is “We will develop an individualized education plan best suited for your child based on his or her interests and needs. We will help your child develop the qualities that would help him succeed in many years to come.”

### **A Day at HIT You’eryuan**

**7:30 a.m.: Children arriving.** Parents are waiting at the gate of the school with their children. At 7:40 a.m., the gate opens, parents walk through the playground with their children, and two school nurses are sitting in front of the school building. They check each child passing by to make sure he or she is physically well, mostly by putting hands on the child’s forehead to test the temperature and checking out the child’s eyes and tongues. After being checked, children enter the school accompanied by their parents and walk towards their classrooms.

Ms. Liu’s classroom is located on the third floor, on the left side of the building. Ms. Liu is standing at the classroom door and greeting children and their parents. After the children get to the classroom, they take off their jackets and backpacks and put them in their lockers located outside of their classroom. After they greet Ms. Liu at the door, they walk into their classroom. Peng says goodbye to his dad at the door and come to the inner classroom. He picks up a rug and selects a spot next to his friend Fan and puts it down. “What are you working on?” asks Peng. “Counting,” says Fan. “Oh, I did that yesterday. I am going to work on something else.” Peng says. And he is walking back and forth in front of the shelf for a couple of times and selects a map puzzle activity and starts his morning exercise.

**8:30 a.m. to 9:00 a.m.: Breakfast.** Ms. Zhang just arrives here. Ms. Liu comes to the classroom and reminds the children that it is time for breakfast, “When you are ready,

please wash your hands and join us at the table for breakfast.” Peng puts his activity back on the shelf and put his rug back at the door and proceed to wash his hands at the bathroom adjacent to the dining room. After he is done, he finds a seat at his friend’s table and starts his breakfast, which are two rice cakes. In about ten minutes, Ms. Liu says, “When you are done with your breakfast snack, please take your chair with you. We are about to start our morning class.” Peng is done with the snack. He stands up and goes into the classroom, leaving his chair behind. After he is in the classroom, he realizes that there is no chair for him to sit in. He goes back to get his chair and puts his chair next to a girl, telling her, “Hee hee! I just forgot my chair.”

**9:00 a.m. to 9:30 a.m.: First class.** All the children are seated in a U-shape, and they are chatting with each other and waiting for the teacher. Ms. Liu comes in and says, “Good morning, friends. Let’s see who are here today.” She starts calling each child’s name. When the child’s name is called, she/he stands up and says, “Yes.” After the teacher calls everyone’s name, she says, “Let’s do a head count.” The children stand up and report their numbers one by one, “1, 2, 3. . . . 30.” “We have 30 children today,” Ms. Liu says. “Let the class begin.” All the children stand up together and loudly greet her, “Good Morning, teacher!” Ms. Liu says, “Thank you. You may sit down.” The class officially starts.

The first class ends at 9:30 a.m. and children have a 15 minutes recess. During the recess, they are encouraged to drink water and go to the bathroom.

**9:45 a.m. to 10:15 a.m.: Second class.** The second class starts around 9:45 a.m.. Today the second class is English. The English teacher Ms. Chen is already here. “Good morning, everyone,” greets Ms. Chen. “How is everybody?” “Fine,” children answer.

“How is the weather today? Is it sunny, cloudy, or rainy?” “Sunny.” Ms. Chen reviews the story they learned last time and teaches the children a new song.

**10:15 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.: Outside activity.** It is time for an outside activity. Children get in line, and Ms. Liu reminds children at the door, “Please be quiet when we walk down the stairs.” Then she leads children down the stairs with Ms. Zhang following at the end of group. The children remain very quiet until they get outside. Once they are on the playground, Ms. Liu says, “If you want to play on this part of playground, please follow me. If you want to play at that part of playground, please go with Ms. Zhang. We will switch in 20 minutes.” The children quickly pick the part they want to play first and form their lines. Ms. Liu and Ms. Zhang are playing with the children first. In about 20 minutes, they switch the parts. They are stepping back and talking to each other while monitoring the children.

Around 10:45 a.m., Ms. Liu says, “Friends, it is almost time for lunch, so please join me after you are done.” Children begin to join Ms. Liu in the line. After a couple of minutes, there are still a few children running around and trying to get one more slide. Ms. Liu says, “Friends, look who are we waiting for?” Some children shout, “Xiaopeng, please get off!” Ms. Liu says, “We will give them 10 more seconds and we are leaving whether they are here or not. One, two . . .” Finally, all the children join the line, and they are heading back to their classrooms.

**11:00 a.m.: Lunch.** After they are back in the classroom, the teacher’s aide Ms. Feng is putting the lunch on the table. “Please wash your face and hands first and do not forget to drink water,” Ms. Liu reminds everyone. At 11:00 a.m. all the children are sitting at the table. Ms. Liu says, “Friends, you may start your lunch now.” “Thank you,

laoshi (teacher).” Ms. Liu and Ms. Feng (the teacher’s aide) are walking back and forth and checking the children. “Peng almost finished his lunch. Good job.” “Please make sure you do not drop any food on the floor.” “Please do not talk when you are eating.” “Please finish everything on your plate. Do not waste food.” Around 11:20 a.m., Ms. Liu says, “When you are done, you may take your chair and go to the classroom.” Children begin to leave the table and go to the classroom. Fang (a girl) is about leave the table with half the meal left on the plate. “Are you done?” Ms. Feng asks, “You are leaving all that food behind again? You know there are children who did not even have food to eat and you are wasting food. You should finish all the food.” Fang sits back again and has a couple of bites, and then she stops, “I really could not finish.” “Okay then” Ms. Feng says. Then she turns to Ms. Liu and says, “She did not finish again.” “Really?” Ms. Liu says. “Give her a small portion next time.”

**11:30 a.m. to 12:00 noon: Preparing for nap.** Some children are sitting in their chairs chatting with each other and waiting for Ms. Liu to give further instruction. Ms. Liu comes in and asks, “Who is on duty for taking off the beds today? Please come out and let’s get the beds ready for the class.” Six boys come out. They work in pairs. Two of them begin to take the cots down from the pile. The other two immediately step up and take the next cot down from the pile while the first two put the cot down on the floor. The last two are arranging the cots that were taken down according to Ms. Liu’s instruction. In about 10 minutes, 32 cots are taken down and put on the right place.

Around 11:45 a.m., all the children are sitting in their chairs. Ms. Liu asks the class, “We are going to watch a DVD today. What do you want to watch?” “Xi Yangyang!” some children shout. Others shout, “Mickey Mouse.” “I heard three answers

so let's vote on these three." "Who wants to watch Xi Yangyang? Please raise your hand." After the voting, "We have nine votes on the Xi Yangyang so we are going to watch Xi Yangyang today." "Oh," a boy sighed, "I wanted to watch Mickey Mouse." Ms. Liu says, "I am sorry but we are going to watch Xi Yangyang today. Maybe tomorrow," while she turns on the TV and DVD.

**12:00 noon to 2:00 p.m.: Nap.** Ms. Liu asks all the children to go to their cots and get ready for nap. Around 12:30 p.m., Ms. Zhang comes in and starts her shift. Ms. Liu leaves for her lunch break.

**2:00 p.m.: Snack.** Children are getting up from their nap. They are putting away their pillows and blankets. Ms. Zhang reminds them, "Please go to the bathroom, wash your hands and come back for snacks." The six boys who are on duty start putting away the beds while the rest of children go to the dining room adjoining to the classroom for afternoon snacks.

Around 2:20 p.m., after most children finish their snacks, Ms. Zhang asks the children on lunch duty to move the tables from the dining room back to the classroom.

**2:30 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.: Story telling time.** Ping is telling a story today. It is a Chinese traditional story about the boy who got a magic pen that can turn everything he draws into reality. It is quite a long story. After Ping is done, Ms. Zhang asks the class, "Did you like the story?" Some friends answers, "Yes." Ms. Liu says, "Okay. I am going to ask friends to share what they like about the story. Who wants to share? Please raise your hand." After a few friends share their opinions, Ms. Zhang says, "I think Ping did an excellent job. She was?? clear and loud so everyone could hear her. She did not miss any details and it was quite a long story. I especially liked how she was telling the story

with her emotions—very expressive. Let’s give Ping a big applause for her good job.” Children applaud. “Please go to the restroom if you need to. If you do not, please take your chair to the classroom. We are going to work on our math shortly.”

**3:00 p.m. to 3:30 p.m.: Math exercise time.** Ms. Zhang asks the children on duty to pass the exercise books to each child according to the names on the books. After all the children receive their exercise books and those on duty are back to their seats, Ms. Zhang tells the class to turn to page 21. She starts to explain the example on the top of page 21. After she is done, she asks the class, “Do you have any questions? No? Okay, please work on the page 21 to 22.” Children start working on their exercise books. It is very quiet in the classrooms. In about 20 minutes, Ms. Zhang says, “Please return your book to me if you are done. I will check the answers for you.” Soon, a girl gives hers to Ms. Zhang and stands by Ms. Zhang while she is checking the answers. As more and more children finish their workbooks, a long line forms waiting for Ms. Zhang to check their answers. Children start chatting in the line. Ms. Zhang soon realizes the problem, and she quickly reminds everyone, “Please stop talking. I could not even hear my voice.” And then Ms. Zhang quickly assigns a student whose workbook has already been checked to be responsible for checking the rest of members at his table, “Xiaoming, here is yours, and please take it. Who else is at Xiaoming’s table? Please go back to your table, and Xiaoming will help check your answers.” After children check their answers and correct them, they turn their workbook back in to Ms. Zhang.

**3:40 p.m.: Dinner.** All the children finish their workbooks, and they are sitting at the tables, waiting for their dinner.

**4:10 p.m.: Free play time.** Children who want to play loud activities or games go into the adjoining room which is also the dining room. Children who want to work on Montessori activities stay in the classroom.

**4:30 p.m.: Children leaving.** Parents start to pick up their children. Bo's dad is the first one who picks him up. Ms. Zhang tells Bo that his dad is here. She is telling Bo's dad that Bo did a great job on the homework for yesterday and what the homework is for today. After Bo gets his jacket and backpack, Ms. Liu waves bye to him and his dad, "Bye, Bo. See you tomorrow."

### **A Day at HFL You'eryuan**

**7:30 a.m. to 8:20 a.m.: Free play.** After children greet Ms. Sun at the door, they walk into the classroom. There are roughly five play areas (language area, math area, art and music area, pretend area, and theme area) besides a quiet work area for Montessori activities. The children go into different play areas and start playing.

**8:30 a.m. to 8:45 a.m.: Breakfast.** Around 8:10 a.m., Ms. Sun reminds everyone that it is almost time for breakfast, and everyone should finish up what they are doing and go wash their hands when they are ready. Children on duty are helping set up tables for breakfast with the teacher's aide Ms. Xing.

Around 8:30 a.m., breakfast is on the table, and Ms. Sun says to the children, "You may start your breakfast." The children respond, "Thank you for your hard work, teacher."

After the breakfast, children go back to their group spot, and Ms. Sun sits down by the piano and plays songs, inviting all the children to sing along while the children on duty and Ms. Xing are cleaning up the tables and putting the tables away.



**8:45 a.m. to 9:00 a.m.: Morning physical exercise.** Around 8:45 a.m., all the children stand in line and walk to the playground for morning exercise. Children from other classes are already standing in lines and waiting for the rest of children to join them. When all the children in the school are ready and standing in lines, the music for the Calisthenics (group exercise) starts playing. Four teachers are standing in front and facing the children, showing the children the steps and movements although most the children are very familiar with the movements. After the calisthenics, children are heading back to their classrooms in lines with each child putting his hands on the shoulder of the child in front of him. The teachers and children refer this as a “choo-choo train.” Each class is one choo-choo train, and it helps make sure that the entire class is at the same pace and no child is left behind.

**9:00 a.m. to 9:40 a.m.: First class (Montessori).** Around 9:00 a.m., Ms. Sun asks the children to do a head count. Children begin to stand up and report their numbers one by one. Ms. Sun says, “We have 24 children today, and nobody is absent. Good job, everyone.” As she announces, “Let’s begin the class,” all the children stand up and greet her “Good morning, teacher.” “Good morning, friends. You might sit down. Let’s review what we learned yesterday before we start today’s lesson.” Ms. Sun says, “Today’s lesson is Triangle Box from Montessori activities.” After Ms. Sun demonstrates the lesson, she tells the children to pick their work from the shelf and start working.

**9:50 a.m. to 10:00 a.m.: Snack.** Around 9:50 a.m., Ms. Su reminds the children to wash their hands after they are done with their work. The children start to put their work back on the shelf and go to the bathroom to wash their hands. After the children are back from the bathroom, they take their chairs, put them by the table, sit down, and wait

for the rest of the children to join them. Ms. Xing and children on duty start putting the snacks on the plates. When all the children join the table, Ms. Sun said, “Friends, you might start.” Children respond, “Thank you, teacher, for your hard work.”

**10:00 a.m. to 10:50 a.m.: Second class (reading).** The children gather around the tables, waiting for the class to begin. There are four rectangle tables with six children sitting at each table. Ms. Sun walks in and gives a pile of books to the four children on duty to deliver to each child. Today’s reading is about the story of race between Rabbit and Turtle. Ms. Sun asks children to read the story first. She then writes a few new Chinese characters that appear in the storybook on the blackboard and explains them to the children. Then she gives the children a couple of minutes to go over the story. After the children are done reading, Ms. Sun asks the children, “Friends, do you remember who won the race?” “Turtle,” children shout. “Yes, that is right. And who can tell me who was ahead at the beginning of the race?” “Rabbit,” the children answer. “Yes, now I need you to raise your hand to answer the next question. I am going to call friends who raise their hands nicely. Why did the rabbit fall behind?” Some children raise their hands. After a few questions, Ms. Sun says, “For this question, I need you to discuss with your friends in your group and tell me what your group’s opinion is. The question is “What you would do if you were the rabbit in the story?”

**10:50 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.: Preparation before lunch.** Ms. Sun asks the children to go to bathroom and wash their hands. After children wash their hands, they come back to their seats. Ms. Sun asks the class, “Who is going to show us a performance today?” A girl in red dress stands up. She was chosen the previous day by one of her classmates to perform for the class. “Ying, please come up. What are you going to show us today?” “I

am going to sing a song.” Ying starts singing. After she is done, Ms. Sun asks the class in a rhetorical manner, “Didn’t she do an excellent job?” “Yes,” the children reply. “Let’s applaud for her performance,” Ms. Sun says. After the applause, Ms. Su asks Ying, “Which friend do you want to pick for tomorrow’s performance?” “How about Tingting?” “Let me check.” Ms. Sun is looking at her sheet. “Tingting already did hers last week. How about we pick another friend who has not got his turn yet?” “Okay,” Ying hesitates for a minute, “Feng?” “Okay. Feng, do you want to perform tomorrow?” Ms. Sun asks. “Yes,” Feng nods. “Great!” Ms. Sun says, “Let’s do our finger exercises today. Please show me your hands and follow my instructions. And for children who are on duty today, please come out and help Ms. Xing set up tables for lunch.” Four children come out.

**11:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.: Lunch.** When the lunch is set on the tables, Ms. Su tells the class, “Friends, you may start.” “Thank you, teacher, for your hard work.”

**11:30 a.m. to 11:50 a.m.: Activity after lunch.** After lunch, the children take their chairs back to their group spots and go to wash their hands. After the children are back in their seats, Ms. Sun said, “Whose turn is it to tell a story today?” A girl stands up and walks to the front of the classroom. “Today, I am going to tell a story and this story is about a pony crossing the river.” After she is done with the story, Ms. Sun says, “Good job! Tell me what you learned from story?” The girl says, “I learned that we need to be brave and need to try.” “What do you think, friends? Do you agree with Lin? Do you like the story?” “Yes” children answer. “Let’s give Lin a big applause for her excellent work.”

**12:00 noon to 2:00 p.m.: Nap.** Ms. Sun leads the children to the bedroom where children from the other two classrooms are already in bed. The children quietly walk in lines and get on the bunk beds and get ready for sleep.

**2:20 p.m. to 3:20 p.m.: Afternoon class.** Around 2:00 p.m., the children get up from their beds and follow their teacher back to their classroom. Ms. Wang reminds the children to go to the bathroom if they need to. After children are done with the bathroom, they take their cups from the shelf and stand in line getting water from the water tank.

Ms. Wang asks the children to stand in line after they are done drinking because they are going to outside for exercise. “Yeah!” shout the children excitedly. Ms. Wang takes a bag and asks the students on duty to step up and carry the rest of the bags and boxes by the door.

When children gather at the playground, Ms. Wang and Ms. Sun leads them to do a few warm up exercises to stretch arms and legs. Ms. Wang tells the class, “Friends, we are going to play some fun games today. We are going to divide the class into three groups and see which group is going to win. We are going to play a three-legged relay game. You will run to this finish line and go back to your team. As soon as you get there, the next pair in your team can start.” There are three teams and four pairs in each team. Ms. Wang passes scarves to each team, and Ms. Sun is also helping tie the children’s legs together. After all the children are tied in pairs, Ms. Wang asks, “Are you ready, friends?” “Yes,” the children shout. “Okay. Please listen to the whistle. You can start as soon as you hear the whistle.” The first pairs of each team ran out as soon as the whistle started.

After the first round is over, Ms. Wang says, “Good job, friends. Team No. 3 won this round. For the next round, we are going to add something new. Do you see this bucket full of Ping-Pong balls? After you run to the finish line, you are going to take the plate and put as many balls as you can on it and carry it back with your partner. You will have an empty bucket where you started for your team, and you will put the balls in your bucket. You guys will have four minutes so we will see which team gets most balls in four minutes. When the four minutes are up, I will blow the whistle. You need to stop when you hear that whistle.” As the first pairs are running from the starting line, the rest of the team members are cheering “You go” for them. The boy pair from the No. 1 team gets ahead of the other runners in the race. After they get to the bucket, the boy in the red shirt takes the plate on top of the bucket. As they both bend over and reach the bucket to get the balls, quite a few balls fall off. The boy on the right quickly says, “You need to hold it tight. I will get the balls.” As they are running back with the balls on the plate, some balls fall off. The boy in the red shirt shouts, “Oh, no!” and attempts to pick up the balls on the floor. More balls fall off as the boy attempts to do this. His partner yells, “Stop. You are going to drop all the balls.” Ms. Sun notices that and quickly reminds everyone of the rule that once the balls are on the floor, they are no longer counted. As soon as the first pair reaches the starting line, the second pair is running out, while the first pair carefully puts the balls from their plate into the team bucket. Ms. Sun comes over and unties the scarf off their legs and puts them back on the next pair. A boy in a blue shirt in the No. 1 team said, “Oh, you guys are so fast” to the two boys who just get back.

Ms. Wang blows the whistle, notifying the children that the race is officially over. Children go back to their team, covered in sweat. Now it is time to count the balls. The No. 1 team wins this time. The No. 3 is in second place while the No. 2 team is in third place. After a few minutes to rest and regroup, Ms. Wang asks the class, “Are you guys ready for one more game, or are you ready to go back to the classroom?” “One more!” the children shout. “Good. This game, you do not need to run. This game is called ‘Pass me the ball.’ We play this game before. We are going to have four teams. You are going to stand in line with both your hands over your head and pass the balls with your hands one by one from the back of the line to the front of the line. The last member of the team will get a ball from the bucket and start passing, and once the ball gets to the first member of your team, he or she will put it in the team bucket in front of him. Please remember you have to remain on your spot. And if you drop the ball, the ball is forfeited. And we have all kinds of balls, basketballs, softballs, play balls, and even Ping-Pong balls. Since you can not see the balls, you need to feel the ball in your hands and be very careful about passing each ball and make sure it is in your teammate’s hands before you let go. We will see which team gets the most balls.” As Ms. Wang blows the whistle, the game starts. Compared to the previous games, this game is much quieter and does not involve much moving. Occasionally, there is a ball that gets dropped. Then I hear the children whispering: “Did we drop a ball?” “No, not us.” “Yes, we dropped a ball.” “No, they dropped a ball.” As the whistle blows, the last game is over. After counting the balls, the teacher announced the No. 1 team was again the winner.

The children head back to the classroom in choo-choo train lines. Ms. Xing brings a big bowl of warm towels and gives one to each child, so they can wipe their faces and

necks. After the children are done, they drop the dirty towels in the big bowl. Ms. Xing will take them for washing and sterilizing. Children get their cups hanging under their cubbies and stand in line to get the water from the water tank. Ms. Wang reminds the children, "Please go back to your chair after you are done. We are going to have a group time before dinner."

**3:20 p.m. to 3:30 p.m.: Preparation before dinner.** Ms. Wang is recapping what happened on the playground and what they learned from playing these games, "You have to work with your partner and keep the same pace with your partner in order for you to win. If you go too fast for your partner to keep up, he might fall and your guys are not going to win. You have to go fast but at the same time keeping the same speed with your partner. The pair who works best with each other wins."

**3:30 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.: Dinner.** Dinner is on the table. The children are having dinner while Ms. Wang is reminding some children to go to special interest class after dinner according to the chart she has. Some children will go to the special interest class such as dance class, art class, public speech class, singing class and math class.

**4:00 p.m. to 4:50 p.m.: Free play.** While some children leave for their special interest class, the rest of children pick the area they want to play. It is free play time. Ms. Wang is working on her teaching material at a table. Occasionally some children come and ask her for help.

**5:00 p.m.: Leave.** Parents gradually come and pick their children up. Ms. Wang stands by the door and hugs each child who is leaving and says goodbye.

## Profiles

**HIT Middle Class Two: Ms. Liu and Ms. Zhang.** Ms. Liu has an associate's degree in early childhood education and has worked for over 13 years. She is 33 years old, and she has been working since she was 20 years old. Ms. Liu was born in the late 1970s, so she grew up during the period when China began transition from planned economy to market economy and many traditional Chinese values were dominant.

Ms. Liu was very welcoming when I came to her class. She seemed very cautious at the very beginning when I asked her opinions about what happened in her classroom. During the last week of my observation, it appeared to me that she opened up to me and talked freely and deeply about her views.

Ms. Liu indicated that her academics were not so good when she was in middle school when I asked about how she became a preschool teacher, and whether she continued to go to high school, which was usually the path to college. She was not confident that she would pass the college entrance exam to be admitted by college. That was why she chose to go to a professional training school, which was the case for most preschool teachers.

Ms. Zhang has a bachelor's degree in Music Performance. She is 24 years old. She just graduated a year ago from college. Different from most teachers in early childhood education in China, her bachelor's degree is her first degree instead of continued education after a three-year degree. She has worked at HIT preschool for about a year. Ms. Zhang was born in the late 1980s, so she grew up in a period of time when the economic reform in China had mostly completed, and the market economy started



blossoming. Accordingly, Chinese traditional values were suppressed while western values, such as individualism, were promoted.

When asked how she became a preschool teacher, she expressed that the job market for college graduates in her major was tough. It was almost impossible to find jobs consistent with her major. Being a teacher is considered to be a suitable/popular job for a woman, and there happened to be an opening from HIT, so she applied. “I never thought that I could become a preschool teacher. It was never in my plan. . . . It worked out great for me though. I am happy where I am right now.” When I asked if she could see herself doing the same job for the next 10 years, she said, “Possibly.”

**HIT Middle Class One: Ms. Huang and Ms. Li.** Ms. Li has a bachelor’s degree in early childhood education and has worked for seven years. She is 28 years old. She was born in the early 80s. She is married and currently pregnant. Ms. Li told me that she loved singing, dancing and performing when she was a child. She did not like studying subjects such as math or history. Her parents thought that going to a three-year teacher’s college for early childhood education was a good fit for her, and she agreed. She just got her bachelor’s degree one year ago as a result of continuing education.

Ms. Huang did not have any formal training in early childhood education and she received a two-year degree almost 30 years ago. She is 46 years old and she was born in the 60s. She started working at HFL as a Bao Yun Yuan (teacher assistant) 22 years ago. She was promoted to head teacher 15 years ago. She is the oldest head teacher at HFL, excluding teacher’s assistants. She is not very talkative. She told me that she went to a professional school for two years to learn to how to operate machines in factories. She worked in a factory for three years, and she could not handle the labor after she was

pregnant because she needed to stand in front of a machine for eight hours every day and sometimes even during the nighttime. She had to quit her job, and she chose to work at HIT two years after she gave birth because they could provide full day care for her child. She is one of the teachers who have been with HIT for the longest time.

**Middle Class Two at HFL: Ms. Sun and Ms. Wang.** Ms. Sun has a bachelor's degree in early childhood education and has worked for 16 years. She is 36 years old. She has a 9-year-old boy. She was born in the 1970s. Ms. Sun was also the curriculum director, and she was in charge of themes and directions of the curriculum for the 4-year-old classroom. She was selected to go to numerous trainings and workshops for professional development every year.

I came from a nearby town not far from Harbin. I have a brother, and we are two years apart. My family could only afford for one of us to go to college. It seemed like the best solution was for me to go to the teacher's college because given my score (from college entrance exam) all the tuition and boarding were covered by the college. Plus I could get a scholarship that was enough to cover my living expense. (Excerpt from interview, 07-09-2010)

Ms. Wang has a bachelor's degree in early childhood education and has worked for five years. She is 26 years old. She was born in the mid-1980s. She has been working with Ms. Sun since she graduated. She graduated from the same college as Ms. Sun.

I always want to become a teacher. My mother is a middle school teacher. When I was a child, she seemed very strict, sometime short tempered with me. I think she was treating me like her students. I thought that all the teachers were like her. When I first went to preschool, the teacher was so nice and patient with me. She talked in a very gentle voice and she was always smiling. I was shocked. It completely changed my mind about what a teacher should be like. I remembered that I could not wait to go to school in the morning and really did not want to go home at night. That experience planted a seed in my mind about becoming a teacher. (Excerpt from interview, 07-10-2010)

**Middle Class Three at HFL: Ms. Feng and Ms. Ming.** Ms. Feng is 34 years old, and she has a four-year degree in early childhood education. She has a 7-year-old

boy. She has been working at HFL for 10 years. Ms. Feng indicated that being a teacher was one of the three best careers for women when she was considering college because it was stable and income for teachers was considered reasonable.

Ms. Ming is 21 years old, and she graduated with an associate degree in early childhood education. She was born in the late 80s. She has been working at HFL for one year for her internship, and she will continue to work at HFL as a head teacher. Ms. Ming expressed that she always loved playing with children and was also very popular among kids.

The kids in my neighborhood all liked me and they followed me everywhere. They all called me 'The kid king'. . . I remember I used to take more than 10 kids and sometimes even 20 kids to the park to play after school. The parents were very happy with me. When it was Chinese New Year, I would get a red pocket (something like tips) from all the parents. It seemed natural to me when I decided to become a teacher. (Excerpt from interview, 07-14-2010)

**The Director at HFL.** Director Wu at HFL is 35 years old and she is pursuing a master's degree in early childhood education. Director Wu talked about one of her childhood experiences,

I always wanted to please the teacher as a child and I always listened to the teacher. I remember we had a public nail clipper in our classroom for everybody to use. It was gone one day. The teacher sat in front of the class and asked who took it. The teacher said, "You might have taken it without knowing, but if you stand up and admit it, it will be okay." I remember one of girls stood up and told the teacher that it could be her. She was one of the teacher's favorite girls and always got praise from the teacher. The teacher said, "that was very good, but it is not you." So I was thinking that I should do that too. And I did after another child stood up. The teacher said, "Yes, it is you. You should bring it back to our classroom." I did not even know what happened after I sat down but I knew I did not take the nail clipper. I remember my mom was very angry with me and we looked everywhere in our one bedroom apartment, and there was nothing. I told my mom that I did not take it. My mom asked me why you told the teacher that you did. I told her it was because the teacher said that a good child should do that, stand up, and admit that we took the nail clipper. I still remembered my mom's words, "How can you be so stupid? Did not you know you did not take it?" All I wanted was to be a good child, and do what a good child would do as the teacher

suggested. We ended up buying a new clipper, and returned it to school. I was probably 4 years old at that time. For that point on, I never volunteered to do anything. I was always very cautious around teachers, and did not really trust them. When I grew up, I knew I wanted to be a teacher, a good one. Now I am a teacher, I always give my students the benefit of the doubt, and I always trust them. I never forced them to do anything they did not want to. I want them to have an independent mind, and form their own judgment. Now I am a director, I want my school to be a place that children feel comfortable being themselves, where they can, not like the military, where the teacher's words are your commands. It has always been my belief. (Excerpt from interview, 07-07-2010)

## CHAPTER 5

### FINDINGS FROM OBSERVATIONS AND INTERVIEWS PART II

I identified seven principal attributes of a good child through classroom observation and interviews with teachers: Individuality, Independence, Optimism, Collaboration, Collectivity, Responsibility, and Honesty. The meaning of these attributes was exemplified through vignettes and interview excerpts, because the interpretations “make sense only when they are grounded in descriptions of local meanings of the people being studied” (Shweder et al., 1990, p. 869). Glesne and Peshkin (1992) suggested there are often conflicting meanings and interpretations. The complexity of meaning of each value is examined and discussed throughout this chapter.

#### **Individuality**

The first desirable attribute that emerged was individuality. Here “individuality” has three primary meanings: (a) creativity and original thinking (创新精神); (b) independent thinking; and (c) have one’s own opinion and self-expression (有主见).

#### **Creativity**

Vignette: “That is Her Name”

At the end of the morning session, Ms. Liu goes to the front of the class, “Can I have everyone’s attention please?” She waits for all the children to look up, and then she says, “I want to show you TianTian’s work. Look what he did with this board.” She is holding a board that looks like a “Connect it” game with circle slots and round chips in some slots. She continues to ask, “What does this look like?” “It looks like a character Tian (田)” a girl answers. “That is her name,” another child shouts out (meaning the character is her first name). “Yes. That is right.” Ms. Liu says, “See, there are many ways to play this game. What TianTian did is very creative. You should all explore in your own way.”

When I discussed this scenario with Ms. Liu, she conveyed that creativity or the ability to create something new and different is a very important quality that children should have in order for them to succeed in the current Chinese society.

We encourage children to use their imagination and be creative. In today's society, it is not enough for them (children) to do what everybody else can do. They have to have their own thing, something different from others. They have to be able to find their own path in order to succeed. (Excerpt from interview, 06-14-10)

Teachers from HFL echoed Ms. Liu's views on this matter and their teaching practices also reflected high valuation of creativity. On the first day of my visit to HFL, when I walked in, I could not help but notice there was a long display table against the wall full of colorful crafts. When I came close, I found they were all different works of art that were made of fruits and vegetables. There was "the Rat family" including Daddy rat, Mommy rat, and baby rat with carved radish bodies and sliced carrots ears. There was a "Choo-choo train" that was made of cucumbers and another one made of eggplants.

When I asked Ms. Sun, she told me that all the art work was made by children from the 4 year old classrooms and their parents, as she further illustrated,

The goal of this event is to help children get familiar with various fruits and vegetables, and help them use their imagination inspire their originality. . . and we have organized many events like this because it is very important for children to have creativity. We have also designed our teaching in the way that could help children use their imagination and develop their creativity. (Excerpt from interview, 07-12-10)

The following vignette from Ms. Sun's classroom further illustrates her last comment.

#### Vignette: Little Tail's Adventure

Ms. Sun is showing a picture of the sea on the blackboard. "What do you see from this picture, my friends?" she asks. "The sea" children answer. "Yes. What do we usually have in the sea?" she asks. "Fish," "Whales," "Sea grass," "Ships," "Seagulls." The children are shouting out all kinds of answers. Ms. Sun says, "Yes, that is great. I have a small fish in my hand, and I am going to put him in the water." She then glues the fish onto the picture of the sea. "I am going to name this fish Xiao Weiba (little tail). Xiao Weiba is new to the sea. He is very lonely so he is looking for new friends. So we are going to help him learn about everything in the sea, and help him meet new friends. What do you think he will meet first?" "Sea grass!" "Sharks!" some children shout out. "Oh, Sharks." Ms. Sun says, "What will happen if Xiao Weiba meets a shark?" "He will be eaten." "No, he can get away. It is a good shark. He is a friend." Children are discussing.

Ms. Sun then says,

Okay. I am going to give each of your guys a picture of the sea with Xiao Weiba and pictures of things you will see in the sea. You are going to use them to make your own picture and story about Xiao Weiba's adventure in the sea. You can choose if Xiao Weiba meets a shark, or a sea turtle, or anything, and decide what happens after that and who he will meet next. Okay?" The children get their materials, and they start to work on their own pictures.

The other teachers I interviewed concurred with Ms. Liu and Ms. Sun and indicated that creativity is a valuable quality that children should have. "We encourage them to think differently and find different ways to do a project or finish a task." (Excerpt from interview with Ms. Wang, 7-14-10) "We are trying to inspire them to use their imagination in our daily activities." (Excerpt from interview with Ms. Fang, 7-19-10)

We have changed our approach. We give children a lot more opportunities to create their own work than what we did five years ago. For example, for our art class, instead of asking children to draw according to the example picture that the teacher showed in front of the class, as we used to do, we are now giving children various shapes, and ask them to put together a picture. We show them a few examples such as using a triangle and a square to make a house, but we do not ask them to do exactly the same. (Excerpt from interview with Ms. Ming, 06-28-10)

We encourage them to use their own imagination in everyday life and be creative. The recent project that we have been doing in our classroom is to use recycled materials to create something new or reuse recycled materials in a creative way. Children came up with all kinds of ideas and we made various vases and holders such as pencil holders from plastic water cups or bottles. (Excerpt from interview with Ms. Li, 06-20-10)

### **Independent Thinking**

The second aspect of individuality is independent thinking and independent decision-making. Teachers consider independent thinking an important quality that children should have. In order to achieve independent thinking, teachers arranged their classrooms and their teaching in a way that allowed children to make their own choices. The atmosphere in the classrooms in general also reflected this emphasis, as teachers respected children's opinions, choices, and rights. The following vignette of an event that

happened in Ms. Liu's classroom is a good illustration of teachers respecting children's individual choice and rights.

**Vignette: His Choice**

It is breakfast time in Ms. Liu's classroom. Children put their activities away, pick up their own chairs, and move them to the dining tables in the adjoining room, getting ready for breakfast. One boy is not moving. He continues to do his activity while all the other children are sitting at the tables, waiting for breakfast. Ms. Liu comes in, takes a quick peek at the room, and notices that the boy is still there. She quickly goes up to him, and asks if he wants to join the other children for breakfast. The boy says no and he stills wants to finish his activity. Ms. Liu lets him be. A few minutes later, breakfast is on the table. Ms. Zhang (Ms. Liu's co-teacher) comes again, and asks him if he wants to join the class for breakfast. The boy insists on finishing his work. She reminds him that he may join them whenever he is ready.

When we discussed the above scenario with both Ms. Liu and Ms. Zhang, they both indicated that it is important to respect children's individual choices and their decisions, and that only by doing can so children feel comfortable and confident enough to make their own decisions and express their opinions.

The atmosphere in other classrooms in general encourages children to speak their minds. The following vignette is a good demonstration of that.

**Vignette: Voting**

It is 3 p.m. and English class is on the schedule, but the English teacher, Ms. Chen, is not here. Ms. Li tells the class that Ms. Chen gets delayed by her meeting so she can not be back for English class today. "Oh," the children ask, "what can we do?" Ms. Li suggests, "Let's work on our math exercise books." "Oh, no, not the math exercises," some children oppose with a sigh, "Could we do something else?" "Okay. What do you want to do?" Ms. Li asks. "How about playing outside?" A boy suggests. "Yeah, that is a good idea," some children second, "we have not played outside for a while." "No. We are behind on the math books in terms of progress, so we should catch up." Ms. Liu replies. "How about we do math first, and then we can play outside?" Another boy suggests. "Yeah, that sounds good" some children echo. "Is that what everyone wants to do? Please raise your hand if you want some time playing outside." Almost all the children raise their hands. "Okay," Ms. Liu says, "Let's work on your math exercises, and then we can go outside."



The above example shows how teachers were involving children in the decision-making process, fostering children's development of their own decisions, encouraging them to express their opinions, and making them feel that their opinions matter. The following vignette further illuminates that aspect by showing how teachers encouraged children to think independently through negotiating.

**Vignette: Negotiation of Rules**

During naptime, the rule is that all children have to stay in their cots. Even if they do not want to go to sleep, they have to stay in their cots from 12:00 p.m. to 2 p.m. Around 1 p.m., Tingting quietly gets up from her cot, and goes up to Ms. Liu. Ms. Liu asks her in a soft voice, "What's wrong, Tingting? Do you need to go to the restroom?" Tingting replies, "No, Ms. Liu, it is my turn to tell a story to the class this afternoon. I am a little nervous. I could not sleep. May I get my book because I want to go over the story again?" Ms. Liu says, "Do not be nervous. I know that you can do a good job, but I cannot let you get the storybook. If I let you do it, then what happens if other friends ask me the same thing? I cannot have all the friends read books during nap time." Tingting pauses for a few seconds, and says, "Maybe not all the friends because I am the only friend who is telling a story later. How about only the friend who is doing the story can have some time to prepare during the nap time?" Ms. Liu smiles, looks at me, and says, "Okay, then. Just take your book and be extra quiet so you do not wake up anybody else."

When we discussed what happened, Ms. Liu said that she applauded for what Tingting did, and that it was very important for children to be able to think independently, express their opinions, and negotiate for themselves.

Tingting used to be very shy. She is still a little bit shy compared to other kids but better than before. I am so pleased with her because she expressed what she wanted, held her ground, and made her case. You know, when she first came to our class, she had to ask other kids' help to tell me that she needed to go to the bathroom. I am so proud of her for being able to talk to me in the way she did and stand up for herself. I actually led a group discussion on this matter in the afternoon. I told the class what happened and asked if they thought it was fair to change the rule. We had a really good discussion . . . I intentionally did that because I want other children to know that it is okay to do that. This is their classroom and the rules are not only there to regulate them but also to protect them and serve them. If adjusting certain rules could better serve them, we can always discuss it. I also want Tingting to know that she made a difference. She should feel proud of herself. (Excerpt from interview with Ms. Liu, 06-17-10)

## Self-Expression

Ms. Liu's comments also pointed out another aspect of individuality, self-expression. During our conversation, she indicated that she was very proud of Tingting because she stood up for herself. She considered standing up for oneself as an important form of self-expression that children need to learn, as she explained, "I want children to know that sometimes they need to stand up for themselves in order to get what they deserve."

**Standing up for oneself.** Ms. Liu further illustrated, by relating to her own personal experience, that standing up for oneself is not only important but necessary for children to succeed in the contemporary China.

It is not enough that you work hard nowadays. It is so competitive. You have to let people know that you work hard. You have to learn to stand up for yourself. I am still not used to it but I know this is something I've got to do. I was born in the 70s, so I was raised in the way that you just worked hard and you did not ask for acknowledgement for your hard work. If you did, that would be considered "not humble enough." Things have changed. . . . I considered myself a hard working gal. I did everything that *lingdao* [an official from a hierarchy, such as group leader, director, associate director in this case] asked me to do, never said no. I always volunteered to run the errands whenever there was a meeting or gathering. I always left last to wrap up things as well, but I did not always get the acknowledgement. For instance, there was this award for working hard, and we discussed whom it should go to at the meeting. I was nominated along with another teacher who performed at the annual celebration at HIT, representing us, which supposedly brought us honors. When I was asked for my opinion, for the first time in my life, I stood up for myself, expressed that I should also be considered as one of the candidates, and listed the reasons why. Even though I did not get it at that time, I still felt good about myself because I tried and stood up for myself. And people started to recognize what I did and appreciate more what I did since then. I received that award the following year. (Excerpt from interview with Ms. Liu, 06-17-10)

Other teachers echoed Ms. Liu's belief that it is important for children to learn to advocate for themselves. "I want them [the children] to know that this is their classroom and they have a say in their classroom as well as I do." (Excerpt from interview with Ms.

Li, 06-24-10) “Children should have a right to do what they want to do in their classroom as long as it is reasonable and it is fair to others. I would encourage them to do it.”

(Excerpt from interview with Ms. Sun, 07-06-10) “Children should feel ownership of their classroom. They can always ask what they want. They might not get it every time but they can always ask.” (Excerpt from interview with Ms. Feng, 07-13-10)

**Expressing one’s emotion.** Self-expression also encompasses two other meanings according to the teachers: expressing one’s emotions, especially negative emotions, and showing and performing one’s talents and strengths in public (表现自我, 当众表演).

Vignette: Say You are Angry

Dong and Ding are having a quarrel. Ms. Li pulls them over, and asks them what is happening. “He pushed me,” Dong says first. “Did you push him?” Ms. Li asks. Ding nods. “Why did you push him?” Ding shows Ms. Li a ripped picture, and says, “He ruined my picture” while whimpering. “I did not do it on purpose. I did not see it.” Dong explains Ms. Li asks Dong, “Did you say sorry?” “No. I did not get a chance to, and he just pushed me.” “Okay, can you apologize to Ding right now?” “I am sorry.” Ding is silent. Ms. Li, “Ding, are you still upset about your picture?” Ding nods. “Okay, can you try to tell Dong that?” “I am very angry” “Tell him why you are angry.” “Because you ruined my picture. I worked a long time on this.” “Okay, that is good.” Ms. Li says, “Next time try to tell him that before you push him, okay? And Dong, you and me, all of us, will see if we can find ways to fix this during free play time in the afternoon, does it sound good to you?”

Ms. Li further illustrates her perspectives on what happened in her classroom.

I think it is important for children to express how they are feeling. I think it is unhealthy for children to bottle up their feelings and act out on anger. Depression among children and adolescents has become a social problem due to high pressure and expectations on children. I think it is important for children to learn to verbalize their feelings, especially negative feelings. (Excerpt from interview with Ms. Li, 06-17-10)

Encouragement of expressing one’s emotions openly is one of emerging concepts in teachers’ practice as well as in Chinese culture. Expression of emotions, especially

negative emotions, was considered as disrupting group harmony and the balance between individuals in Confucianism and traditional Chinese culture. Chinese people felt very resistant and even ashamed about expressing their emotions openly and that would be still the case for many Chinese people from the older generation. The emergence of this concept is a reflection of a social issue in Chinese society, as indicated by Ms. Li.

Other teachers' beliefs resonated with Ms. Li's comments. They stressed that it is important for children to learn to express their emotions openly, as Ms. Ming at HFL explained,

We want children to learn to express their feelings and want them get comfortable expressing their feelings. For example, in our classroom, in the morning time, we have a sort of ritual where I sit in the middle of a circle while children come up to me one by one, and tell me how they are feeling. Children tell me, "I am feeling good today," or "I am feeling a little sad," and sometimes they say something silly or funny such as "I am feeling hungry," I give them a big hug after they finish, and tell them "I love you" or something causal such as "I like your hair today." I want them to get familiar with articulating their feelings so it does not seem foreign to them when they need to do so. (Excerpt from interview, 07-15-10)

**Performing in public.** Another emphasis of self-expression is to be able to perform in public (by public, it could mean in front of friends and family, or in front of classmates/schoolmates, or an even bigger crowd). It is a common expectation for Chinese children that they should be able to perform in front of their family and friends, or sometimes even in front of people that they do not even know. It is also a Chinese tradition that parents ask their children to sing a song, or recite a poem, or perform something at gatherings of friends or family. Teachers are very aware of this tradition and they also concur that performing is an essential skill that children should acquire as it helps children overcome fear and establish their self-confidence. As Ms. Liu illustrated below,

We have all sort of events at school that children can participate in, where they can perform in public, such as the “I am a Future Star” singing and dancing competition or “Little Host” public speaking competition. We want to give children a platform to show their talents. We also have story-telling time every day in the afternoon. We ask children to pick a story or a poem or something they like and tell it to the class, but they have to recite the story. During the past year, I have seen huge progress that children have made. At the beginning, some of them were very nervous, forgot their lines, or could not speak up, but now I can tell you all the children in my classroom can stand up in front of the class and tell a story without any stutter. Some of them might still feel a little uneasy when they are telling a story in front of the class, but that is okay. As children are getting better at this and feeling more comfortable, they also feel better about themselves and feel more content about themselves. (Excerpt from interview, 06-18-10)

Ms. Sun illustrated the expectation to perform well in public from another perspective.

Parents always asked us what their children learned today, you know, what song, what poem, what story, and such. At social gatherings or when there are guests in the house, they would ask their children to perform something such as a song, or a story as a courtesy. They [the parents] would not only feel disappointed but “lose face” in front of their friends or guests if their children refuse to perform or could not perform well. The children are well aware of their parents’ expectations. They feel the pressure, and they also want to do a good job to make their parents proud and “gain face” for them. (Excerpt from interview with Ms. Sun, 07-06-10)

### **Independence**

The second desirable attribute emerging from observation and interviews is independence. The term “independence” in Chinese means self-reliance or self-sufficiency. Specifically, it emphasizes the ability to take care of oneself or to support oneself.

Children should be able to take care of themselves, such as dressing themselves; eating by themselves; washing their hands and going to bathroom by themselves; and other basic routines in life. They also should know how to call for help, make a phone call such as calling their parents or the police; how to get home (by walking, or by bus), how to deal with strangers, how to deal with emergencies such as fires and so on. It is very important that they learn all these basic life skills. They have to be physically independent in order to be emotionally independent or think independently. (Excerpt from interview with Ms. Feng, 07-13-10)

Besides taking care of self, the teachers also specified three other meanings of independence: (a) independent thinking; (b) the ability of finishing tasks given or solving problems independently (autonomy); and (c) self-control and self-correction.

**Independent thinking.** Independent thinking means that children should be able to think on their own, form their own judgment, and make their own decisions, which was discussed previously under individuality.

**Autonomy.** Teachers revealed that it is essential for children to be able to finish tasks or solve problems autonomously. Teachers conveyed that children nowadays lack the ability to finish a task despite the level of difficulty and they tend to ask for help as soon as any problems occur. Teachers believed that it is imperative for children to learn to finish tasks on their own without asking for help or at least try to do that.

Almost every child in my classroom is the only child in their family. (We only have one exception, NiuNiu, who has a brother and they just moved back from the U.S.) And the parents are also only children in most cases. As you can imagine, the children nowadays are very spoiled by their parents and their four grandparents. If there is any problem, their parents or grandparents would get rid of it before the children even ask. That is why they (the children) would tend to stop, and ask for help whenever they encounter a tiniest problem. (Excerpt from interview with Ms. Ming, 07-14-10)

I think an important criteria to evaluate whether a child is independent is to see if he can solve problems that he encounters when doing his work, or at least if he can try to solve them before asking for help. In our classroom when children come up to me and ask for help, I let them try to solve it themselves first. It is imperative for children to be able to initiate the process of working on a problem when it occurs instead of asking for help right away. (Excerpt from interview with Ms. Li, 06-21-10)

**Self-control.** Independence also means self-control (the ability to control one's emotions and behavior) and self-correction (the ability to correct one's behavior).

Self-restraint and behavioral inhibition were emphasized as one of the goals of education in Confucian philosophies (Chen et al., 1998). They were also seen by Chinese parents as a sign of their children's social maturity as well as accomplishment, and mastery (King & Bond, 1985). Teachers revealed that one way to tell whether the child is independent is to see whether he can restrain himself as the situation requires and whether he can correct his misbehavior as suggested.

Ms. Liu's comments further explains its meaning as follows:

I expect our children to be able to control their behavior. . . . I meant they should be able to follow directions, wait for their turn, and follow the classroom rules while in the classroom, follow the playground rules while on the playground, follow the game rules while playing a game. They should be able to regulate their behavior as the situation requires. If it is naptime, then it means everyone needs to stay on their cots, close their eyes, and rest. Some children might want to talk because they could not fall asleep or they are bored, but they should be able to control their urges to do that, knowing that there should be no talking during naptime, and if they talk, they would disturb other children, and violate other children's rights to sleep or rest . . . . For example, when we are having the flag-raising ceremony, especially during the national anthem, children need to stand still on their spot with their hands on the sides of their body and eyes on the flag. I expect our children to be able to do that. (Excerpt from interview, 06-20-10)

The national flag-raising ceremony is usually held every Monday and on special days at school. Whether children are able to stand still as they are asked was one of most frequent examples of self-control that teachers gave. It appears to me that teachers put a lot of emphasis on children restraining themselves during the ceremony. The following vignette illustrates teachers' emphasis on self-control.

**Vignette: Learn from Our Soldiers**

After the flag ceremony, Ms. Li calls for a group time and says to the class, I noticed that few of our children were looking around and swinging their arms when everyone else was watching the national flag rising. What are we supposed to do when the national anthem is playing? (Children answered) Yes, our eyes are supposed to be on the flag while our hands are on the seams of our pants. It is our way of showing respect to the national flag and our soldiers who defended our

country. After the breakfast, I am going to tell you a story that happened during the Anti-Japanese War.

Ms. Li is telling the story to the class after everyone sits back in their seats.

Xiao Wang and the other soldiers in his unit were hiding in the bushes. They got a message that the Japanese army would go through this trail to invade the village ahead. They waited here under the command to ambush the enemy. A mosquito circled around Xiao Wang's head. He did not move. Then the mosquito landed on his nose. He did not move. The mosquito bit him on his nose. His nose grew a big red bump and it was very itchy. He still did not move. But . . . wait . . . he heard a whizzing noise. He saw a dark greenish thing moving towards him. It was a snake. He was scared but he did not move. The snake got closer. He felt the snake was crawling onto his skin. It creeped him out, but he did not move. He felt the snake moving under his shirt. He did not move, and finally the snake went away. The Japanese army had no idea that there was an ambush ahead so they came closer and closer. Xiao Wang and his unit waited until they were close enough and successfully ambushed the enemy.

Ms. Li then asks the class, "Why did not Xiao Wang move?" A few children raise their hands. "Xiao Feng, can you tell us?" "Because if he moved, the enemy might notice." "Yes, that is right." "So what would happen if the enemy noticed them?" "Xiao Yan, can you tell us?" "They could have been killed." "They could lose the battle," another child answers. "Then what would happen if they lost the battle? Would they still be able to stop the enemy from invading the village?" "No." "No, they could not. And the people in the village could have been killed."

Then Ms. Li summarizes,

Xiao Wang did not move because he knew if he made even a tiniest movement, he might expose himself and his unit and alert the enemy. The entire unit would thus fail the mission. Hundreds of people in that village would have been killed as a result. They are our heroes. They defended our country so today we could have a safe and peaceful environment. Do you want to be just like them?

"Yes" children answer. "Great! Next time, at the national flag ceremony, I hope everyone can stand just like our soldiers with eyes on the flag and hands on their pants."

Ms. Li's interaction with children indicated her belief on the importance of children learning to restrain themselves in certain situations. Given the importance, teachers told me that they intentionally help children increase their self-control by training them to gradually increase their control over their bodies and movements through



various activities in the classrooms, such as Montessori activity “Walking on the line,” or “I am statue” game. As Ms. Li described, “Through this exercise (walking on the line), the child can develop his self-control by practicing his mind control over his body’s movement and keeping balance.”

### **Optimism**

The third desirable attribute is optimism. It contains four primary interrelated components: (a) having a positive attitude towards oneself (self-confidence) and being able to self-evaluate positively and objectively; (b) having a positive attitude towards others and being able to evaluate others positively and objectively; (c) having an enthusiasm for life; and (d) having a positive attitude towards criticism and undesirable situations, and being able to cope with them.

#### **Positive Attitude towards Self**

Having a positive attitude towards self goes beyond “feeling good about oneself” or “having a sense of self-satisfaction” in the teachers’ elaboration. It also means being able to evaluate oneself in a positive, yet objective way, recognizing what one is good at, what one achieves, and what one still need to improve.

We want our kids to have a “healthy” image of themselves. By that, I mean that children should have a realistic view of who they are and what they can do. Children today are centers of their families. They are used to hearing praise all the time for everything they do, or sometimes they do not even need to do anything. We don’t intend to give kids any vague compliments such as “you are so pretty/handsome” or “you are so smart.” They do not mean anything, and you can say that about anybody. They tend to give children the wrong impression about themselves. For example, some children feel intimidated about trying new things or solving more advanced math problems. They feel that they will not be smart again if they can not do them very well. Their confidence is based on these vague compliments from adults. (Excerpt from interview with Ms. Wu, 06-20-10)

Ms. Sun provided an example that could further illustrate the meaning of helping children have an objective view of themselves.

We have a girl in our classroom, Nana. She is very articulate and is very good at telling stories. Her mom really pushed her into performing on various occasions. We had a school-wide singing competition last semester to select the best singers to perform at our school celebration party at the end of the year. She is not particularly talented in terms of singing. She often would sing out of tune, which is pretty common for a lot of kids at her age, but there are also some children in our school who are very talented in music and who can sing very well. I would not push her to enter this singing competition personally. If it were a competition for public speech, I would definitely recommend her to go. But her mom was very eager to let her enter the competition, and she did, and, of course, Nana did not get selected. She was very upset, and started crying after she heard the result. Her mom came over to comfort her and she said something like, “You sang it very well. I do not understand why you did not get selected. The other girls who won did not even sing as half well as you did. I do not know what the judges were thinking. You did a great job.” So instead of helping their kids face the reality, some parents are blaming others or finding excuses to make the kids feel better.

When I got a chance to talk to her after the competition, we had a conversation about what she thought about her singing and what she thought about other children’s singing. During our conversation, I found out that she thought that she should become a singer because her mom told her that she was so talented in singing that she should become a singer. I was speechless. I think it is one thing to tell the kid “good job” even if she did not sing very well, but it is another thing to go extra step to tell the kid who could not sing that she was so good at singing that she should become a professional singer. If the parents did not even have an objective view of their kids, how could we possibly teach their kids to look at themselves and their work objectively?

I told Nana that I was very proud of her because she was very brave and calm on stage; she did not miss any words in the lyrics nor miss any key, and she sang better than she ever did before (which was true). She worked very hard for the competition and she did the best she could and that is all that matters. I also told her that I thought that the kids who won did an excellent job and they won because, first, the songs they picked need the singers to reach various levels of keys in one song such as a lower key at the beginning and a higher key at the end, second. . . . I listed a few reasons that I thought these kids got selected. I want her to realize that those kids did do an excellent job, at least at this competition, and they won fair and square.

I told her that if she wants to learn how to sing songs like that, maybe she could ask me or Ms. Lu (who is the music teacher) for some advice. And we are going to have another competition next year. (Excerpt from interview, 07-15-10)

## **Positive Attitude toward Others**

Ms. Sun's illustration in the latter part also exemplifies the second meaning of optimism, which is being able to evaluate others (and others' work) positively and objectively. Teachers emphasized that children should learn to look at the merits of others instead of the shortcomings, as well as have tolerance of others who might appear different from them.

Ms. Feng further illustrated this aspect with what happened in her classroom.

Children should learn to look at others in a positive light. For example, we have this activity in our classroom-"I am unique." The chosen friend gives a speech about himself and what is special about him during group time. After the speech, we will let a few friends share what they like about the chosen friend or what they know about him. Their comments have to start with "I like XXX because". This morning Xiaoping was the chosen friend. He is not a popular kid in the class. He is a little overactive and careless so accidents always happen around him. We just had an accident this morning at breakfast. He knocked over the other child's bowl off the table by accident when he stood up from his chair. We have friends who would tell me that they do not want to sit next to him. This morning when it was time for friends' comments, nobody offered to say something. So I volunteered and I said, "I like Xiaoping because he is very brave. I know that Xiaoping has been taking Kungfu classes and I know he would protect me." Then Ms. Ming said, "I like Xiaoping because he is very polite and responsible. He says sorry and he always cleans up his mess." It was still silence so I said, "Ms. Fu (music teacher) told me that she likes Xiaoping because Xiaoping is really nice. He never gets upset or angry." Finally, we had a friend who raised her hand and told the class, "I like Xiaoping too because he is nice. One time when I ruined his picture, he did not get upset with me." . . . We encourage children to focus on the merits and good things about their friends. (Excerpt from interview, 07-21-10)

As teachers indicated that children should have a positive attitude towards others, they also held that children should learn to assess others' work objectively. The following vignette further illustrate how teachers facilitate children assess others' work objectively through peer critiquing.

### Vignette: Peer Critiquing

It is academic time in the morning. Ms. Liu is reviewing Pinyin (Chinese pronunciation) that she taught yesterday. Ms. Liu says, "I will ask a friend to come up and write a lowercase 'c'." A boy gets chosen and writes a 'c' on the blackboard. After he is done, Ms. Liu asks the class, "Is this correct?" Some says yes and some says no. Ms. Liu calls a child who says no and asks her "why is this not correct." The girl stands up and says, "'c' should be written in the middle part, between the second line and the third line, not the top part." Ms. Liu says, "That is right. Who can come up and write 'c' in the correct place?" Then she calls one of girls up who writes "c."

Ms. Liu asks another student to write a lowercase "a" on the blackboard. After he is done, Ms. Liu asks the class if it is correct. Some says no, so she calls a student to explain why it is not correct. The girl answers that it is too small so it does not look very nice. Ms. Liu says, "Yes, it is a little bit small, but is it correct?" The students are not agreeing with each other, saying yes and no. Ms. Liu finally says, "Yes, it is correct. It is a bit small. The top of an "a" is supposed to touch the second line and the tail of "a" is supposed to touch the third line. Now I am going to ask someone to write another "a" for everybody. Let's see who practiced at home." And she calls a girl in red shirt to write another "a" on the board. After the girl is done, Ms. Liu asks the class, "How about this?" Some say "good" and a couple of say "not good." She calls one of children who said "not good", and asks her why it is not good. The girl says, "The tail of 'a' is a bit small. It should be bigger." Ms. Liu looks at the letter again, and replies, "I think it is just fine. It looks pretty good to me."

In a later interview, Ms. Liu explained her belief on use of critiquing as a strategy for children's self-improvement. "Critiquing including peer critiquing is a good way to teach children to look at their own work and others' work objectively and an important way to show them how to improve their work and get better." Other teachers concurred with Ms. Liu's opinion on critiquing, but also pointed out that there has been a change in how the criticism is delivered, "The criticism we used before was usually straightforward, which could be too harsh for children to take and could discourage them from learning and improving. We are employing constructive criticism." (Excerpt from interview with Ms. Sun, 07-14-2010) The teachers believed that through constructive criticism, children could learn to evaluate others' work in a factual way.

We use constructive criticism in our classroom. We do not encourage children to give purely negative critiques such as, it does not look nice or it is bad. We encourage them to use facts when evaluating others' work such as, "it is not correct because it is missing a line (writing a Chinese character)," or "it will be better if all the blanks are filled with colors." Through constructive criticism, children receive suggestions about where they can improve. It is more likely for them to accept without feeling upset or offended. (Excerpt from interview with Ms. Li, 06-20-10)

While teachers encouraged the use of criticism in their classroom, they were also aware of the negative impact that it might have on children. They believed that children should learn to look at criticism in a positive light, which was embodied in the 4<sup>th</sup> meaning of optimism—coping with criticism.

### **Emotion Management**

The 4th meaning of optimism emphasized emotion-management—the capacity to cope with criticisms (that come from outside) and frustrations (that develop within self). The teachers expressed their concerns about children nowadays who can only hear praise but not criticism. Even when children do a poor job, parents are still praising and they are expecting teachers to do so as well. Ms. Liu asked, "If you praise them (children) when they do a poor job, what do you do when they do a good job? If they do not learn to handle a little criticism now, how could they deal with setbacks in life when they are older?"

**Coping with criticism.** There was a quote from an American writer, Hugh Black, on the wall of the director's office at HIT, "As fruit needs not only sunshine but cold nights and chilling showers to ripen it, so character needs not only joy but trial and difficulty to mellow it." As the director interpreted it, "Criticism might seem harsh, but I believe it will benefit children in the long run in terms of building a strong character.

And she was not alone. Teachers believed that criticism is just as important as encouraging children and praising them. The teachers believed that reasonable and constructive criticism would help build a strong mentality for children and prepare them for the frustrations and setbacks they were going to encounter in life later on.

Encouragement of criticism or critiquing a classmate's performance is not uncommon in Chinese classrooms. Teachers believe that children should get used to criticism and learn to look at it in positive way, mostly due to the fact that criticism is very common in large context of Chinese society.

Criticism permeates Chinese society, and it has come a long way in Chinese culture. Confucianism promoted self-criticism as means of cultivating and acquiring virtue as well as fighting against selfishness. Both were rooted in the Chinese tradition. Mencius believed that human nature was inherently good, but in order to maintain the goodness, one must constantly engage in self-cultivation and self-examination. The focus of self-criticism had transformed to criticism within the group during the Mao period. Mao advocated the use of criticism and self-criticism as a way of overcoming complacency and obtaining correct thought. Moreover, public meetings were held for this purpose, especially during the Cultural Revolution. [In my opinion, the Cultural Revolution was partially a result as well as an elevated manifestation of the use of public criticism in meetings.] After the Cultural Revolution, the tradition of criticism and self-criticism continued. Group members were expected to engage in peer criticism and self-criticism of thoughts and behaviors during work and party meetings. I observed the encouragement of critical feedbacks on teachers' performance during teachers' meetings at both schools.

Given the history of the development of criticism in China, it is not hard to understand teachers' acceptance of the use of criticism in their classrooms, as Ms. Feng concisely put, "I understand criticism can be harsh to children. I also believe that children can improve themselves through criticism. Nevertheless, Chinese society is a critical society. If you cannot change that, you better find a way to deal with it. The earlier, the better." (Excerpt from interview, 7-13-10)

**Coping with frustration.** Children should also be able to cope with frustrations. The teachers expressed concerns that children of this generation tend to get upset and frustrated easily when they do not perform very well, mostly due to the fact as only children they are likely to get everything they want in their family as well as the pressure and high expectations from parents and family members.

Teachers believed that the experience of overcoming difficulties is important for children to keep a positive attitude towards any undesirable situations. They referred it as "frustration education." As Director Wu explained,

We believe in frustration education. We want children to realize that it is a good thing that they encounter difficulties or challenges in their life. It is nothing to be afraid of. That is part of growing up. We read, and discuss stories such as Helen Keller, Li Bai (one of the most famous ancient Chinese poets), Ma Liang, and we even tell our own personal stories. We want them to know that everyone encounters difficulties in his or her life. Difficulties can be overcome by hard work or finding other solutions. Overcoming the difficulties makes you stronger.

We also create difficult situations that target their fears or shortcomings, at a reasonable level, of course, and help them overcome those fears, and therefore establish their confidence. (Excerpt from interview, 07-07-10)

Ms. Ming gave me an example in her classroom to further illustrate Ms. Wu's comments.

You remember Niuniu, right? She used to be very shy. She is still a little shy, but much better than before. She had a hard time expressing herself in front of unfamiliar people. Even with us, she could not speak up. We sometimes ask our students to borrow balls from other classrooms when we need them. So I intentionally asked her to go to other classrooms and get basketballs. At first, she said, “I do not want to go.” And I asked her, “Why don’t you want to go?” She paused, so I asked her, “Are you afraid?” She looked at me, and nodded. I told her that all she needed to do was to go to Classroom B at the end of hallway, knock on the door, ask the teachers, Ms. Wang and Ms. Sun if they have the ball. If they said yes, then she needed to ask them if she could have the basketball for our class and they would give the ball to her. And then I looked into her eyes, and told her that I believe that she could do it, and the class needs her to bring back the basketball. I would be waiting for her right here at the door, so she went. She stopped when she was at Classroom B and she turned around, looking back at me. I knew she needed a little encouragement. I was waving at her, and signaling her that she needed to knock the door. She just stood there, not doing it. So I left the door, called Ms. Wang, informed her about the situation, and asked her to open the door. When I came back to the door, I saw Ms. Wang already opened the door and was talking to her. I could not hear exactly what they were saying but I saw her talking to Ms. Wang and then Ms. Wang gave the ball to her. And she was almost running back to me after she got the ball. She was very excited. I told her, “Good job. See it is not hard at all, right?” And she agreed. I asked her if she wanted to go to Classroom C downstairs and get another basketball. She said yes. And she did it all by herself . . . . I also told the class that Niuniu got us the basketballs today and we should say “thank you” to her. The children clapped their hands and said, “Clap, Clap, you are the best. Thank you, Niuniu.” I wanted to give her a sense of accomplishment and also wanted her to feel acknowledged by her classmates. I intentionally asked her to run similar errands in the following days and she never had any problems with them. Even now, I would still ask her once in a while to do stuff like that. (Excerpt from interview, 07-24-10)

Ms. Sun illustrated her belief that children need to learn that it takes time, patience, and hard work to overcome difficulties and it is crucial for children to learn to do that.

I think it is very important for a child to know that it is okay if he finds some tasks challenging at first. As teachers, we need to teach children to have a positive attitude towards the challenges and not to be afraid of them or run away from them. We need to let them experience the joy of doing something that they could not do before . . . . For example, we had a DIY Montessori bead stringing activity in our classroom. Compared to the original Montessori bead stringing materials, the beads are much smaller and instead of lace, we use a thick thread. There is a boy in our classroom, Ding-Ding. He picked that one, and had a hard time putting the thread through all the beads so he got really frustrated, and splashed the beads



all over. I saw that, so I asked him to clean up and pick a different activity. At the reading time after lunch, I picked the story about Li Bai. (It is a story about a Chinese famous poet Li Bai who used to skip schools all the time when he was a child until he witnessed that the old woman next door took days to grind an iron rod into a needle.) I led a discussion about what we can learn about the story, and I let children know that sometimes it takes time, patience, and hard work to accomplish a task. The next morning, I pulled Ding-Ding aside when he came in and I showed him a scarf I was knitting. I told him that I have been working on this scarf every day for over a month. I could only knit for two rows per day at first because I was not very good, but now I can knit 20 rows easily every day. I asked him to try the bead stringing activity again but this time he only needed to put five beads on the thread. He could try putting on 10 beads the following day. And he did. By the end of the week, he could put all the beads through the thread. And I took a picture of his work, and gave him a prize for accomplishing that, but I believed the biggest prize for him was accomplishing it all by himself, and the confidence he got from doing that. (Excerpt from interview, 07-21-10)

Ms. Liu told me a similar story that resonates with Ms. Sun's example.

Ming-Ming was not very good with his hand coordination at the beginning of semester. There was an activity of picking up small beans with chopsticks. It was not hard for most children in the classroom, but he was having a difficult time with it. I saw him playing with it once and got frustrated and never touched it again. It is no big deal if he is not good with using chopsticks, but it is more than that. Children need to know that they should not shy away from problems because the problems are not going away by themselves. You face them. I encouraged him to try the activity again in the following week. He refused, and told me that he was not good at it. So I told him that nobody was good at it at first. It even took me a few times try in order to pick up all the beans with chopsticks. He will get better but he is going to have to try. After he finally tried, I told him, "Wow, you picked up ten beans this time. That is awesome. Let's see next time if you can pick up 20 beans." His mom later told me that he insisted on using chopsticks at home instead of spoon. I told his mom it was probably because of what happened at school. By the end of the semester, he could pick up all the beans in a timely fashion. I gave him a Persistence Award for not giving up, and told him that I was very proud of him. (Excerpt from interview, 06-21-10)

Through these examples of "frustration education," teachers encouraged children not to give up easily, to face the challenge, and eventually find a way to conquer it.

### **Enthusiasm towards Life**

The last meaning of optimism is an enthusiasm towards life. The emphasis is on the attitude of enjoying life and loving life. Specifically, in the classroom setting, it

means enjoying learning, doing class activities, hanging out with friends, and so on. As Ms. Huang illustrated,

I just love children who are always happy to come to school and ready to do everything. They just enjoy everything. They enjoy doing chores, love learning, and love to participate in class activities. They never seem tired and always energetic. Always say yes to new things. They just have this enthusiasm and passion that could easily influence other friends and even me sometimes. (Excerpt from interview, 06-19-10)

### **Collaboration**

The fourth desirable attribute is collaboration. The term, “collaboration” in this study consists of four primary interrelated components: (a) the ability to understand others’ feelings (empathy) (能理解别人的情感, 富有同情心), (b) care for others (主动关心别人), (c) the ability to work with others in harmony (与小朋友友好相处, 平等合作), and (d) willingness to help others in need (帮助有困难的小伙伴).

### **Dongshi**

The first and second components are intertwined and they contain a Chinese concept of *dongshi*. *Dongshi* is an important concept in children’s moral education in Chinese culture (Wang, 1996). It can be literally translated as “reaching the age of maturity.” Its meaning is far more complicated than that. It implies that once a child reaches a certain age, he is able to understand others’ feelings, figure out what the expectations or desires of others without their articulating or asking, and take actions to meet the expectations. It requires children to be both perceptive (to sense the other’s feelings and expectations) and considerate (to initiate a caring action to meet the expectations). There is no agreement about what age should be the age of *dongshi*, but research has indicated that it can be as early as the age of two (Ho, 1986). Therefore, in

China preschool children are definitely expected by their parents and teachers to be *dongshi* or at least learning to be so.

The following vignette is a good illustration of the meaning of *dong-shi*.

Vignette: “Please Drink Some Water”

Ms. Liu is telling the entire class that she has a sore throat and it hurt when she talks so all the children should be extra quiet. During the academics, Ms. Liu is standing in front of the classroom while children are working at the tables. She starts coughing. A boy from the nearest table gets up and goes to the teacher’s desk by the door, and grabbed Ms. Liu’s thermal cup and brings it back to Ms. Liu. “Teacher, please drink some water and you will feel better.” He says.

As I discussed this scenario with Ms. Liu, she expressed that boy (Feng) has always been very considerate (*dongshi*),

The other day, when I was presenting the teaching materials, I accidentally flipped over the board, and dropped the pieces everywhere. I was a little frustrated because it was going to take a while for me to pick them all up and it would delay the schedule. Feng immediately got up, and started picking up beads off the floor. A few other children at his table also got up after him, and started helping, too. It only took a couple of minutes before they put all the beads back in the box. Of course, I praised him in front of the class, along with the other children who were helping.

And as we discussed it further, she articulated,

It is not really about helping. Of course, he is very helpful and it is a good quality that you want to see in a person. However, it is more than that. It is the fact that he offers help without asking, and that he can “see” the fact that I need help. You do not see that very often in children of this generation or even the 90s generation. (Excerpt from interview, 06-17-10)

Then she lowered her voice and implied that Ms. Zhang, her co-teacher, who was born in the late 80s, did not even have that quality. She told me that because Ms. Zhang was a young teacher who just started a year ago and did not have any early education training, Ms. Liu was still technically her mentor besides being her co-teacher. “If my mentor were sick and could hardly speak, I would offer to take over the morning or even switch the days, but she did not say anything.” Ms. Liu said.

The vignette above described a common scenario that would happen in Chinese schools: students offer to help a teacher without her asking, for example, carrying teaching materials for the teacher, opening the door for the teacher, and so on.

Teachers encouraged these kinds of behaviors in the classrooms, and would usually praise the children with these behaviors in front of the entire class. They believed that other children can learn to be caring and considerate through the demonstration of “exemplar” children. The teachers also suggested that it is their responsibility to show children how to be caring and considerate, as Ms. Liu explained, “It is common that children at this age might not understand or care how others feel. They might walk right by when a friend is crying without asking or checking. It is the teacher’s responsibility to show them or teach them to care for others.” (Excerpt from interview, 06-12-2010)

**Vignette: Caring for a Friend**

A boy runs over, and tells Ms. Liu that Peng is crying (please note it is more of sobbing than crying because it is not loud and it is very gentle from my observation) because he gets hurt. Ms. Liu checks on him, and finds out that one of his fingers gets pinched by the board. Ms. Liu brings Peng to the center of the circle after putting a bandage on the finger, and asks the class, “Peng hurt his finger. Does anyone want to come over, comfort him, and make him feel better?” Some children raise their hands and Ms. Liu calls one of the boys. The boy comes up, gives Peng a hug, and says, “I hurt my fingers too last week and it stopped hurting after a couple of days. It is going to be okay.” Then Ms. Liu asks the class, “What should we do when our friend gets hurt or feels sad?” A girl stands up, and says, “We should comfort him (or her).” “Yes,” Ms. Liu says, “We should try to make him (or her) feel better, and show him that we care.”

When we discussed this scenario, Ms. Liu said, “We need to teach children to care for others. Children now are the center of their families and they are probably given everything they ask for. It is very easy for them to think only of themselves, but it is important for them to learn to care for others. And if they do not learn that now, they are never going to learn it later in their life.” (Excerpt from interview, 06-21-10)

However, on another related scene that happened on the following morning added some complexity to the issue.

*Vignette: He is Interrupting My Work*

A boy runs to Ms. Liu, and tells her that Peng is crying next to him and it bothers him because he could not focus on his work. I thought that Ms. Liu would encourage the boy to be considerate and even try to comfort Peng, but instead Ms. Liu suggests that he find another spot to continue his work. Ms. Liu keeps on doing what she is doing and does not go to Peng and check on him. I am observing Peng and he weeps for a while, then he gradually stops, and continues his work.

When I discussed this incident with Ms. Liu, she explained that she believed it was that boy's right to work without interruptions. If it was not his work time, then she might consider suggesting that he should comfort Peng. Because it was his work time, his priority was to finish his work and he was entitled to work on his activity. However, if he chose to stop working and to comfort his classmate Peng by himself, she would be fine with that, too.

In this scenario, the teacher did not encourage or ask the child to calm his friend who was crying because she believed that it was the child's individual right to work without interruption. This indicates a fundamental change in Chinese culture: Helping is no longer promoted as a selfless act that entails sacrificing one's interest for the group or others; helping becomes an individual choice that should be respected. Teachers are also aware of this change, as Ms. Wu explained,

We are encouraging children to be caring and helpful but not at all costs, certainly not for the price of sacrificing their own interest. . . That was not definitely the case when I grew up. When I grew up, I was taught by teachers to be a selfless person and to help others unconditionally. Even though I was fully aware as I got older of the fact that I could not possibly be selfless all the time when helping others, and I believe that everyone including the teachers were fully aware of that as well, the point was that children "should" be taught to be selfless or teachers "should" teach students to be selfless. (Excerpt from interview, 07-21-10)

The shift of focus from promotion of selflessness to helping children to respect an individual's right to help or not is indeed a strong indication of the development of individuality in Chinese culture.

In a word, while teachers emphasized the importance of *dongshi* and being caring and considerate, they also indicated that they respect each child's individual rights and above.

### **Working in Harmony**

The third component emphasizes interpersonal skills about working with others in harmony. Teachers considered it as a necessary skill that children should have. Teachers pointed out that children of this generation usually do not get much experience of playing with siblings at home due to the one-child policy. Children are given priority at home and all their needs are satisfied by their parents and grandparents. Many children had to learn to share with others, wait for their turns, and work with other children when they first came to preschool around the age of three. The HFL school director and teachers speculated that they have designed their curricula and activities to purposefully develop the children's collaborating skills so the children could enjoy their experience of working with friends.

Many Chinese traditional games, you know, the games that we played when were children, focus on teamwork, and need children to work together. We incorporated those games into our curriculum, and we want children to have a fun experience of working with other kids. We want to help them enjoy working with others. For example, the three legged relay game, which we all played when we were children, is a classic game that helps children learn to work with their partners. It teaches children to pay attention to their partners and to adjust themselves to better cope with others. This game teaches children that it is not about how fast they can go; it is about how fast they and their partner together can go. (Excerpt from interview with Ms. Sun, 06-21-10)

Teachers at HIT school also agreed that it was crucial for children to be able to work with others even though their curriculum was mostly focused on academics or mastery of knowledge. They indicated that their daily routines are carried in a way that requires children work with each other collaboratively, such as working together to take out cots, and move tables.

The following vignette is an example of Chinese traditional games that were played at the HFL.

**Vignette: You need Your Partner**

On the playground at HFL, Ms. Feng says to her class, Remember the fun relay game that we played on Monday. We are playing it again today. We have three teams, blue, yellow, and red. In front of each group is the same color of balloons. You are going to work with your partner, and transfer the balloons of your team color with your bellies only. Once you reach the finish line, you can put your balloon in the bucket at the finish line with your hands, run back to your group, and the next pair in your group can start. Remember no hands once you start walking. If you drop the balloon, you can stop, and pick it up, but once you start walking, no hands. Whichever team first successfully transfers all their balloons to their basket wins.

After all the first pairs of children in every team are set with the balloons between their bellies, Ms. Feng asks, “Are we all ready? Okay. Go!” The children begin waddling slowly toward their finish line. All the first pairs of children get to their finish line with their balloons. The blue team pair run back first and the second pair of the blue team starts again. As the game goes on, the green team first drops their balloon. The wind blows the balloon a little farther and the boy is running to get the balloon. The rest of the green team is cheering and shouting, “Come on. Get the balloon! We are losing.” The blue team first finishes transferring all the balloons. Ms. Feng and Ms. Ming give all the children in the blue team a golden star and the rest of children get a different color star such as silver, blue, and red.

These Chinese traditional games also, in the Ms. Ming’s words, help children understand that “it is not enough that they can do a good job individually” and “sometimes if they want to win, they have to work with others.” Echoing Ms. Ming’s opinion, other teachers also indicated that it is essential for children to know how to work with others in order to succeed in Chinese society.

Ms. Liu's comments below further illustrate the teachers' belief about children need to know how to work with others.

We have a friend in our class, Ben-Ben, a very smart boy. He is very advanced in language, math, and science. He could do 2-digit multiplication, and he could read over two hundred Chinese characters when he was four. However, he used to be the least likable child in our classroom. When we were playing group games, he was always the last person that friends wanted to pick for their team. I noticed that he wanted to play with other friends but did not know how to work with others. For example, he was always the first to finish the worksheet and then he would check other friends' worksheets at his table. He would say things like "you are so slow. Look what I did. This is so easy for me." The friends at his table would tell me that "Ms. Liu, Ben-Ben is interrupting me" or "Ben-Ben is so annoying." I had to talk to him, and told him that his words might hurt other friends' feelings, and since he was so good with the math, he could help other friends with their work, but he should not make any negative comments to make others feel bad. I told friends that they could ask Ben-Ben to help check the right answers if the teacher is busy. That was a start . . . . For children like Ben-Ben, we need to encourage them to think about others' feelings, and show them how to work with others. (Excerpt from interview, 06-21-10)

Ms. Liu's illustration above further demonstrated the importance of children's ability working with others, which was reaffirmed by other teachers as well.

### **Offering Help**

Collaboration in Chinese (合作) implies a very important quality—willingness to help others, which is why I place it in this category. Teachers indicated that offering help is a good quality for children to have. Sometimes how helpful a child is used as an indicator of how well the child is liked by others. A helpful child is very likely to be liked by most children in the group.

#### **Vignette: Let Me Show You Around**

Ying is new to the class this summer. Ms. Liu greets her and her mom at the door. She clings onto her mom, and refuses to go into the classroom. Ms. Liu calls another girl (Meimei) over, and asks her to take Ying. Meimei comes over, and takes Ying's hand, and says, "Let's go. I am going to show you what I am working on." Ying goes with Mei and they sit down at the table, and join the rest of the group.



Later Ms. Liu told me that on Ying's first day, she asked the class who would like to show Ying around and make her feel comfortable. A few girls volunteered. She picked Mei because Mei was easygoing and caring.

The vignette above describes a common practice in Chinese classroom and also a tradition in Chinese culture, which is to select a representative to welcome a newcomer to the group and help her familiarize with the group and make her feel like a member of the group. It is worth noting that helping new comers did not just happen on the first day. In fact, the girl in the vignette, Mei-Mei, along with other friends, have helped Ying, the new comer, for two weeks. The vignette happened on the Monday two weeks after Ying joined the class. As Ms. Liu illustrated, "We kept these traditional rituals because we believe they will give children an opportunity to help others and to feel the sense of accomplishment as well as joy through helping others."

Other teachers also kept certain Chinese collective routines in their classrooms that were embedded with the notion of helping each other. The follow vignette was another example.

**Vignette: Helping You Is Helping Me**

Ms. Feng and Ms. Ming are doing warm-up exercises with the children on the playground. The children walk in a circular line with each child's hands on the shoulder of the child right in front of him. As Ms. Ming says, "Pat, Pat, Pat your friend's shoulders. Friends, Xinkule (you all work very hard)," every child starts to pat the shoulder of the child in front of him. [It is considered as a form of massage in China that is supposed to relax the muscles.] Every child is patting the shoulder of the friend in front of him while the friend behind him is patting his shoulder. Ms. Feng and Ms. Ming also lower their bodies so the children behind them could reach their shoulders. Then Ms. Ming says, "Now, turn around and pat the other friends' shoulders." As children turn around, the friend who was in front of each child becomes the friend behind him. The child who patted the shoulder of the friend (who was in front of him before) gets his shoulder patted on by the same friend (who is now behind him).

Ms. Ming told me that this was one of the traditional routines that they kept, and she was very fond of this routine because it taught the children that “helping others is helping themselves.”

The director at HFL, Ms. Wu, told me that in order to teach children to help others, they regularly organized special activities so the children could enjoy the experience of helping others and feel the sense of achievement through that experience. For example, every last Friday of each month, the 5-year-olds class would go into the 3-year-olds classrooms and spent two hours there. This event is called “Big hands helping little hands” day. Five-year-old children have the opportunity to help three-year-old children wash their hands, go to the bathroom, have snacks, read stories, or do crafts together.

As the director Ms. Wu further explained,

They are all the only children in their family. They never got to be the big sisters or big brothers, or they never got to be the little sisters or little brothers. It is a Chinese virtue to take care of the young and respect the elders. We teach children about these Chinese virtues in class, but very few of them would have that real experience of taking care of younger sisters or brothers or being taken care of by older sisters or brothers. We wanted to create that experience for them and they loved it. (Excerpt from interview, 07-21-10)

### **Collectivity**

The next attribute is collectivity (集体观念) or collective spirit. Collectivity embodies a few meanings. First, it means that children need to understand that they are part of the group and should feel honored to be part of the group, or in other words, have a sense of their group identity. Second, children should care about other members in the group and value group integrity. Third, it means that children need to understand their responsibilities towards the group, as well as fulfill their duties towards the group.

## Group Identity

The teachers explicitly stated that it is important for children to recognize their group identity, meaning that children should be aware of being part of the group and feeling honored to belong to that group. The group in the teachers' description typically means the class the children belong to (even though the first group children usually belong to is their family). However, it goes beyond the concept of classroom. It also means the school, the hometown, and the nation.

**Group identity: School.** The following vignette illustrates an example of how teachers constructed a collective experience for children in the school context.

### Vignette: We Are a Family

It is about 6 p.m. on June 17, 2010 at HFL. It is a pajama party night for children from the 4-year-olds and the 5-year-olds classrooms. There are about two hundred children and twenty teachers at school right now. On the playground, the teachers are playing various Chinese traditional games with children. Ms. Sun is playing a traffic light game with the children from her class and Ms. Wu is playing a handkerchief game with her class (sort like the "duck, duck, goose," game in U.S.) on one side of the playground. On the other side of the playground, the children from the 5-year-olds classroom are playing catching games with their teachers.

About 6:30 p.m., children from the 4-year-olds classroom first follow their teachers to the multi-media room which can hold up to 200 people, where a huge buffet is waiting for them. Children are standing in line, and talking to each other, commenting on the food. While most of the 4-year-olds get their food, the children from the 5-year-olds classroom join them in line. After everyone gets their food, and sits by the table, the director, Ms. Wu, stands in front of the room giving a short speech, "Children, we are so glad to have you here. We had a wonderful semester . . . We should thank all the teachers who prepared for this wonderful evening." "Thank you for your hard work, teacher," the children speak loudly together. Ms. Wu says, "Dear friends, you may start your dinner."

After the dinner, the children go back to the multi-media room where a movie (a 20 minute long cartoon) is playing on the big screen in the front of the room. Following the movie, the teachers take the children back to their classrooms, and get ready for bed. I follow Ms. Sun, and go back to her classroom. Some children are brushing their teeth, and washing their faces in the bathroom while Ms. Wang is assisting other children with carrying their washing bowls back to the classroom after they get water in the bowls. Ms. Sun reminds children to gently

put down the bowls so the water won't spill. "We only have few bowls so please share the bowls with your friends and if you spill the water by accident, please get the mop, and clean the floor." The children are laughing, and talking while they are washing their feet together.

Around 8:30 p.m., Ms. Sun leads the children to their bedroom where they usually take a nap. Children from another class are already in bed. Ms. Sun reminds them to go to their beds quietly. After all the children are in bed, she turns off the light, and says "good night." She and Ms. Wang are going to sleep in the classroom adjoining the bedroom in a folding bed.

The director Ms. Wu told me that they hold the sleep over night once a year, usually during the summer when the weather is warm and nice. The goal of this event is to help children understand the concept of being part of a big community as well as to help them enjoy being part of the community.

We want our children to understand that we are not just a school. We want them to think of us as a big family. We want them to love being part of this family. . . We believe that it is important for children to experience a collective life. By providing a collective experience like that, we are hoping that the children will enjoy their school life more and enjoying being part of our school. (Except from interview, 7-24-10)

Other teachers during their interview also commented that it is hard for children of this generation to understand the concept of "collectivity" when they do not have that experience in their life due to the change of family structures.

When we grew up, we had a big family. In our family, there were my brother and me, but we had 12 cousins, six from my mother's side and six from my father's side because both my parents had five siblings in their families. And we lived very close to each other. We got together all the time. I remembered that we used to have a big family dinner every week and we took turns holding the dinner. The dinner would include the entire family so we would have over 30 people. Nowadays, children of this generation do not have that anymore. They usually do not have any cousins because their parents are the only children as well. They do not have the experience of being in a big extended family and thus did not have the chance to live a collective life. (Except from interview with Huang, 6-24-10)

**Group identity: Nation.** As one of the Chinese traditions, there is a national flag raising ceremony on every Monday, or on special days, such as National Day, when the

weather allows. In this ceremony, everyone including all the children, teachers and staff is outside on the playground, dressed in uniforms, watching the national flag rise up while they sing the national anthem. Usually, there is a speech before the national anthem. The director of the school or the selected teacher or child can give the speech. It is considered an honor to speak at the flag-raising ceremony for either teacher or child. This tradition has lasted for 40 years, and it has not changed. In fact, it is not only a tradition but also a requirement stated clearly in the laws and regulations recently published by the State Education Commission.

Vignette: We are Chinese

It is Monday at HFL. All children stand in long lines in their class spots with their teachers being at the end of each line. There are two lines of children for each class. The classes are aligned from left to right. On the playground are the 3-year-olds classes, the 4-year-olds classes, and the 5-year-olds classes. Teachers are dressed in school uniforms. Two boys and two girls dressed in special uniforms are standing by the flagpole, and they are selected to raise the flag for today's ceremony. One teacher is standing by to monitor the situation. Today's speaker for the ceremony is Guan from one of the 5-year-old classes. She give a short speech about how much she enjoyed her life at HFL and how grateful she is for her teachers and her friends, as she will graduate and begin her study at primary school. At the end of her speech, she says, "Now, it is time for raising the flag." As the national anthem starts, the children standing by the pole start to pull the ropes down, and the flag slowly rises up. When it gets very close to the end of anthem, the flag is still halfway there. The teacher standing by comes over and helps the children with pulling the rope. Finally, the flag reaches the top as the anthem ends.

As teachers at both schools explained, the flag raising ceremony was meant to remind children of another large group identity that they have: they are citizens of China. Teachers usually give a brief introduction or review of the meaning of the national flag and the national anthem right before or after the flag ceremony to reinforce the concept of being Chinese. For example, Ms. Liu asked the class before the ceremony, "Do you know why the national flag is red? It is because thousands of soldiers lost their lives when

defending our country so we can live in a safe and peaceful environment. The red color represents the lost lives of those soldiers.” Through these ceremonies, children learn that they are citizens of China and that being Chinese is part of who they are.

### **Group Integrity**

The following vignette illustrated the second meaning of collectivity: group integrity.

#### **Vignette: I Forgot My Red Shirt**

It is a special Monday at HIT. In Ms. Li’s class, Taotao forgets wearing his red shirt and his Dad is very apologetic because, given the distance and traffic, there would not be enough time for him to go back home, get the shirt, and be back on time for the ceremony. Ms. Li, then, explains the situation to the class, and asks the class if anyone who lives nearby has an extra red shirt at home that could lend Taotao. Feng raises his hand, and tells Ms. Li that he has another red shirt at home and his grandparents are at home. Ms. Li asks Ms. Huang to call Feng’s home to see if his grandparents could find the red shirt. Not only did Feng’s grandparents find the shirt, but they are willing to bring the shirt over, since they live in walking distance from the school. Finally, all the children in Ms. Li’s class attend the ceremony in red shirts as required. After the ceremony, Ms. Li addresses this incident again at group time,

We won a golden star again today for showing up on time and all dressed in red shirts for the ceremony. Thanks everyone. I want to give special thanks to Feng and his grandfather who helped bring a red shirt for Taotao, so the entire class was able to attend the ceremony in red shirts as required. Without their help, we would not have won a golden star. Can you say thank you to Feng, friends?

“Thank you, Peng” children then shouted.

And remember we are a family. We should always help each other out. We also need to remember that every one of us represents Middle Class 2. When one of us forgets to wear his red shirt, it is the entire Middle Class 2 who does not dress as accordingly. It is the entire Middle Class 2 who would not win a golden star for being the best class. We are all in this together and we need each and every of one’s efforts. Good job, friends!

Later when I discussed this incident with Ms. Li, she said,

With only children being the center of the family, it is hard for them to understand the concept of group integrity. It is hard for them to think about how their actions might affect not only themselves, but also others in the group, as well as the entire

group. It is really up to us (teachers) to reinforce that concept in their lives and help them understand the importance of group honor. (Excerpt from interview, 06-24-10)

Other teachers also spoke of the importance of the flag rising ceremony, and conveyed that it is necessary for children to learn and understand the concept of group integrity and group honor.

We were taught that one should sacrifice individual interests for the collective goods when we grew up. We were taught to be selfless. It does not work that way anymore. Nowadays, everyone seems to only pay attention to their individual interests, what they can get instead of what they can contribute. Individual interests are important and should be valued but group integrity is also important. We are not teaching nor asking children to sacrifice their interests for the group benefits. However, children need to learn that sometimes individual has to compromise for the benefits of the group. It might be hard for them to understand that at the beginning, but it is necessary for them to learn that. (Excerpt from interview with Ms. Wang, 07-21-10)

The following vignette that describes another incident at HIT further illustrates that aspect. The vignette described an incident that happened during the first week while I was at HIT. The entire school was busy preparing for an annual performance show for all the parents. All the afternoon classes were cancelled. Teachers used the time from 2:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. to help children go over their performance. Each class had one class performance. Some children, who specialize in dance or singing or music instruments, might participate in other shows besides their class performance.

#### Vignette: You Represent Our Class

Ms. Liu's class' performance is a group dance. Before nap time, Ms. Liu is showing the rehearsal video taken the previous day to the class. Ms. Liu points out the children who did not perform well, such as missing steps or being slower than others, and reminds them to practice more at home. Ms. Liu says,

This is our class performance. If you miss a step, it will affect the entire performance. Everyone, including the teachers, has worked very hard to make our performance a good one. I hope that friends who still miss steps will work harder and catch up with the rest of class.

In the afternoon that day, Ms. Liu assigns friends who already mastered the steps in the performance to help those who have not. They work in pairs. A girl comes up to Ms. Liu and complains that her partner always gets the steps wrong and she does not want to work with. Ms. Liu says,

This is a group performance. Everyone needs to know their steps in order for us to give a great performance. I know that you are doing a wonderful job, but it is not enough. Everyone needs to do a good job. We are in this together. Helping him is helping you and helping all of us. Would you do that for us?

Then Ms. Liu emphasizes it again to the entire class,  
I see some friends are not working well together. You need to work with your partner. Please remember this is a group performance. Everyone is in it. We will deliver a good performance only when each and every of you do a good job. When you get on the stage, you are not Xiao Ming, or Xiao Peng, or Xiao Feng. You only have one name. You are Middle Class 2. All of you represent Middle Class 2. Do you understand?

Ms. Liu stressed again in her interview that it is very important for children to understand sometimes they have to compromise and cooperate during group performance for the integrity of the entire group. As Ms. Liu explained, “Children need to learn that because this is how it works in Chinese society. They are going to encounter situations like that sooner or later in their life.”

### **Group Responsibility**

The third meaning is that children need to understand the responsibility towards the group as well as fulfilling their duties towards the group. Given its importance and complexity, it will be discussed in a separate section under Responsibility.

The following vignette about public scolding is a good illustration that embodies a combination of three dimensions of collectivity.

#### **Vignette: Public Scolding**

Ms. Li is demonstrating a Montessori activity (Triangle Box). Children are sitting in their chairs along the circular line. One boy moves himself from his chair and sit on the floor. Ms. Li notices, and gives him a warning look, and continues her presentation. Then the boy moves again to lie on the floor. Ms. Li stops her demonstration, instead of directly correcting his behavior like I would expect, she



says, "Dear friends, what should we do when teacher is teaching? Should we lie on the floor?" "No." The children reply. Ms. Li says, "I am not going to continue until a friend is back on his chair." One child says, "Xiao Ming, please sit back on your chair." Xiao Ming sits up but still is not back to his chair. Ms. Li looks at him, and waits. In a minute, a few more children speak up, and shout at Xiao Ming, "Go back to your chair." And then Ms. Li says, "All the friends, eyes on Xiao Ming, let's see if he can go back to his chair." Xiao Ming finally goes back to sit on his chair. And then Ms. Li says, "We wasted three minutes because we had to stop, and wait for Xiao Ming to sit back to his chair. If we can not finish the presentation, please remember whose fault it is."

Another similar incident happened in Ms. Liu's classroom as well. A boy kept talking to others when Ms. Liu was presenting the academics. After a few attempts to stop him by giving him warning looks, and reminding him, Ms. Liu asked him to sit next to her. And she asked the class, "Do you know why I asked Gaogao to sit here?" "Yes," the children replied, "Because he is misbehaving." Ms. Liu then said, "Yes, so please everybody, keep an eye on him, and make sure he is behaving."

Later when I discussed the incidents with both the teachers, they implied a few layers of meanings underlying their actions. First, during group activities, each and every child should be aware that he is part of group (group identity) and his actions, especially wrongdoings, will affect not only him but the entire class (group integrity). Second, it is everyone's responsibility to make sure the class is running properly, not just the teacher's job but every child's responsibility as well (group responsibility). Third, when a child is misbehaving to the level that affects others or the entire class, actions need to be taken such as public scolding to help him correct his behavior.

I believe that it is necessary for children to know that we are a group. We are related to each other . . . . It is everyone's duty to keep the order in the group . . . . It is also everyone's right to stop anything that affects the entire group . . . . I want our children to feel that they should stop something like that instead of just standing by and watching it happen. (Excerpt from interview with Ms. Li, 06-21-10)

All the teachers indicated that they are very familiar with the use of public scolding in the classrooms and they have used it in a varying degree. They also conveyed that they might approach the incident the same way.

Behind the action of public scolding, it is the belief that most teachers have about shame. The purpose of public scolding is to make the child feel ashamed of what he did and therefore help him correct his behavior.

Shame is heavily emphasized in Chinese culture. Research have shown that Chinese caregivers and teachers have a tradition of using shaming techniques to educate children in the realm of social and moral behavior (Fung, 1999). Chinese children are also familiar with the word “shame” as well as shaming techniques from an early age (Shaver et al., 1992).

Shame to the Chinese is not just an emotion, rather it is a moral and virtuous sensibility that should be pursued (Hu, 1944; Hwang, 1987; Schoenhals, 1993). There is an old but still very popular saying in Chinese that was originated from Confucianism, “It is courageous to feel ashamed.” Shame was considered in Confucianism as a human capacity that directs the person to self-examine and motivates him to amend himself. Teachers believed that drawing others’ attention to the child’s misbehavior forces the child to face his wrongdoings and “awaken” his self-respect so he can correct his behavior.

By pointing out his misbehavior, I know that he would feel “losing his face,” especially with all the friends in the classroom watching him. I hope that he would feel embarrassed and ashamed about his behavior, which he probably did because he immediately corrected his behavior . . . . I know that it was very embarrassing for him but I believe that it was a good experience for him in the long run. If he can remember how embarrassed and shameful it was for him, he probably is not going to make the same mistake again, or at least, give a second thought before he is about to do something like that next time . . . . It (public

scolding) also shows other friends how embarrassing it is and reminds them to watch their own behavior so they do not have to experience that embarrassment. (Excerpt from interview with Ms. Liu)

Ms. Liu mentioned a Chinese term “losing face” in her conversation above. Face in Chinese culture has a special meaning. It could be understood as one’s social image that is publicly and collectively perceived by others. It represents one’s dignity and self-respect. Losing face could only happen in the presence of others because it implies one’s behavior is causing the withdrawal of acceptance from group members as well as loss of other people’s confidence in one’s character. Losing face is usually accompanied by shame while shame is sometimes the result of losing face.

### **Responsibility**

The next desirable attribute is responsibility. The teachers conveyed that a good child is first a responsible child. Here, the term “responsibility” has two dimensions: responsibility for oneself and responsibility (looking after) for the group. Both of them are equally emphasized. Children need to know that they are responsible for their own actions, such as returning the material to the shelf after they are done. The teachers also implied that children should be aware of their responsibilities towards the group as members of the group. “Group” means a social unit such as family or class.

#### **Responsibility for Oneself**

The following vignette further illustrated the teachers’ interpretation of responsibility for oneself.

Vignette: “It is his Responsibility”

During free play time in the morning, Tingting is playing with beads from the Montessori materials. She accidentally spills all the beads everywhere. Two boys next to her see that, stop their work, and start helping her pick up the beads. Ms. Liu sees that and she gently pats on the two boys’ heads, and says, “That is very kind of your guys.”

At the end of free play time, everybody is putting away their materials. Ms. Liu stands by the door, and reminds everyone, “Breakfast is almost ready, please put away your activity, and wash your hands.” A boy rushes out of the classroom, leaving his rug on the floor when he hears Ms. Liu. Tingting is just done with putting away her materials, and sees the rug that boy left, so she picks up his rug on the floor. Ms. Liu notices, and says, “Do not pick it up for him. Do not help him. It is his responsibility.” Then Ms. Liu calls that boy back, “You forgot to put away your rug. Please pick it up.”

When I discussed the above scenario with Ms. Liu, she clarified the difference between two incidents. In the first incident, it was encouraged to help a friend who was in need. In the second incident, it was not encouraged to help a friend by doing his job for him. She emphasized that children need to learn to take on their own responsibility and should not expect anybody else to pick up after them.

Besides responsibility for oneself, teachers pointed out the other very important aspect of responsibility: responsibility towards the social group such as class, family, school, and nation.

We help children learn responsibility throughout our daily routines. For example, in every classroom, children took turns being the students on duty. Students on duty are responsible for setting the tables and utensils for lunch, taking down and putting back cots for the entire class for naptime, helping teachers with passing out materials, and such. In some classrooms, students on duty were also responsible for the lights, i.e., to check if the lights are off when they leave the classroom and the door is closed. (Excerpt from interview with Ms. Li, 06-15-10)

Some teachers articulated recycling as one of the ways to teach children about responsibility: responsibility for the environment.

We taught the children about pollution and how to make good use of the waste. We taught them that we only have one planet and we are responsible for it. Each and every one of us should do something to make it better. (Excerpt from interview with Ms. Wang, 07-15-10)

## **Filial Piety**

Another very important aspect of responsibility emphasized by teachers is familial responsibility: filial piety.

We taught children to not only take care of themselves, but also to look after their parents. A child is also a family member and he is responsible for his family. He should contribute to his family. If Mom or Dad is sad or in a bad mood, he should do something or at least make an effort to do something so as to make them feel better. (Excerpt from interview with Ms. Sun, 07-14-10)

Filial piety is an important virtue in Confucianism and Chinese culture, meaning the respect and duty of caring for one's parents.

The teachers suggested that the primary responsibility children have is their responsibility for their parents and thus they need to learn to care for their parents, especially when filial piety, a long held Chinese tradition, seems to be forgotten by a generation of young people.

Now we have this generation of children who grew up feeling like they are entitled to everything. A lot of them ask their parents to pay for their designer clothes, buy their cars and even buy their houses. When their parents can not afford to do so, they complain (and some of them even ask their parents to borrow from relatives to satisfy their needs). They do not have an appreciation for how much their parents did for them, nor do they work hard to get what they want. Nowadays, some parents are happy and think their children have filial piety because their children wrote them a thank you card after their parents bought them a house. (Excerpt from interview with Ms. Huang, 06-24-10)

Echoing the same concern, the teachers at HFL indicated that they have been teaching children about filial piety through their practice.

We believe that it is very important for children to have an understanding about, as well as appreciation for, what their families do for them . . . . We teach our children to care for their parents and to help out at home . . . . For example, on Mondays, instead of asking children “what did you do this weekend,” we asked them “what did you do for your family this weekend?” On Fridays, we would remind them that their parents worked really hard for an entire week so they could go to school or go to the park (because the parks in China usually require costly tickets to enter) or have Oreos or eat at McDonald’s. We discuss what they could

do for their parents during the weekend so their parents could have a restful weekend. (Excerpt from interview with Ms. Feng, 07-17-10)

The director at HFL, Ms. Wu, gave me an example of an event they organized to teach children appreciation for their parents. On Mother's day, they organized a special event. They took the children to visit some of their moms at work after careful arrangements with parents' work places and working schedule. The children brought flowers to their moms at work. When the child was giving flowers to his mom, the rest of children from the class would stand behind him, and shout out, "Mama, thank you for your hard work."

For instance, one of our children's moms worked in customer service at the mall. After visiting her, we discussed that some mom's jobs required them to stand and talk for most of the day, helping other people. We encouraged children to think about how they would feel if they stood all day, whether their feet and legs would be sore, or how they would feel if they talked all day, whether their throat would be sore. What could we (as children) do to make moms feel better after working all day? For example, bring a cup of tea to mom, massage mom's legs after mom got home, help mom with dishes so mom can rest on the couch, and such. (Excerpt from interview with Ms. Wu, 07-09-10)

Many teachers stressed the importance of filial piety as well as responsibility in a child. In their words, "A good child has to be a responsible child without any doubt."

### **Honesty**

The last desirable attribute is honesty. The meaning of honesty is clear, rendering further explanation unnecessary. Teachers especially expressed that lying is unacceptable in a child. There is this notion of "Once a liar, always a liar." However, teachers also expressed that if a child can admit his or her mistake and be honest, he or she should be given a second chance. A good child does not mean a perfect child.

Vignette: Who knocked over the bookshelf?

A girl comes in from washing her hands after breakfast. She bumps some books off the table when she is walking by. She pauses for a second. (She seems to

hesitate and may wonder if she should pick all the books up). She picks up a book, and puts it back to the table. She then proceeds to her seat, leaving the rest of books on the floor. The second who comes into the classroom is a boy and he notices the books on the floor. He stops at the table, and picks up one book, and goes back to his seat. More and more children come into the room and some of them stop, and pick up books on the floor, while some just walk right by without picking up any books. Ms. Liu comes in when Fan (a boy) is picking up books from the floor. She asks “Why are there books on the floor? Who did it?” “No one is answering and then she notices Fan who is standing in the crime scene, so she asks “Was it you?” “No?” Fan replies with not very affirmative tone. Then Ms. Liu says, “Pick all of them up,” and she asks, “Who is on duty? Please come out, and help Fan pick up the books. We need to start the academics soon.” A couple of children come up, and help Fan with the books.

I discussed this incident with Ms. Liu during naptime. I asked her impression of the child, Fan. She said that he was a little shy but in general he was a good kid. She said, “He is the type of kid who is never in trouble. He is obedient. He will do what you tell him to do. I wish that he would be more out-spoken and he would express his opinion more.” After we continued the conversation, I was a little hesitant about whether I should tell Ms. Liu that it was not Fan who knocked the books off the shelf, but nevertheless I did tell her. I told her what happened without specifying each child involved. I told her that I did not feel comfortable or that it was necessary to tell her that information when she asked me which child did it. She looked surprised and she said that Fan was too *laoshi* (a Chinese concept implying being both obedient and timid). Since he did not do it, he should stand up for himself instead of keeping silent, which would be taken as guilt. She continued to say that this type of personality would have a hard time succeeding in the current Chinese society, and Fan should change.

It is worth noting that on the same day, Ms. Liu followed up this incident. She joined Ms. Zhang in the group time before the afternoon snack for it was not her shift. In

the group time, Ms. Liu told the class that she had something that she wanted to discuss with the class.

This morning, we had an accident. Someone bumped into the bookshelf, and knocked the books off the shelf. I thought it was Fan, but it was not, so I am sorry, Fan, for letting you take the blame. And thank you for helping with picking up books. It is a small thing to knock all these books off the shelf. Accidents happen, and it happens to everyone including the teachers. However, it is a big thing to leave the books on the floor without picking them up, and it is even a bigger thing to let someone (another friend) take the blame for what you did. I understand that there are a lot of books to pick up. You could have come up to me, and told me about the accident and you probably need help picking up with all the books. I would have asked other children to help you. And that would be the end of it. I would not criticize you; like I said, accidents happen. However, you did not come forward when I asked who did it, and you let someone else to take the blame for something you did. That is not okay. Look what is written on the wall. We need to be honest children, and we do not lie. For whoever did it, you can come forward now, or if you do not feel comfortable, you can come to me privately. I will not pursue this matter anymore if you acknowledge what you did.

In the follow-up interview, Ms. Liu told me that the girl eventually admitted it to her. And she told the girl that it was okay because everybody makes mistakes and she was very proud of her to have the courage to admit her mistake.

Other teachers concurred with Ms. Liu on her perspective on lying and suggested that they took lying seriously. In Chinese culture, lying, especially children's lying, is considered a serious character flaw. Parents and teachers frown upon it, and there is a consensus they should not let children get away with it. Teachers take lying seriously because they believe it reflects the moral character and integrity of a child. Teachers believe that a child needs to be corrected immediately when he is lying, otherwise he would think it is okay to lie and he would keep lying.

### **Obedience**

Obedience is no longer considered as one of the desirable qualities in children. Teachers considered it as a somewhat negative term to describe a child in varying degrees



for it implies “not being able to think independently” or “not having individualistic identity.” Obedience can be understood as following teachers’ directions and following the rules. With the change of classroom structure to an emphasis on child-initiated activities, following rules or listening to teacher is not as important as it was before.

*Vignette: Raise your hand*

In the discussion following the story reading, Ms. Sun asks the class, “Could you tell me why rabbit fell behind in the race?” “Because he fell asleep,” Dongdong quickly shouts out while others are raising their hands. “I am going to call a friend who is raising her hand nicely—Xiaoxiao, can you tell us why?” “Because the rabbit took a nap,” Xiaoxiao stands up from her chair, and answers. “Very good, thank you, Xiaoxiao” Ms. Sun says. “I just said the same thing. I was right,” Dongdong whispers, in a lower voice yet loud enough to be heard by everyone in the classroom. Ms. Sun continues her questions, “Could anyone tell me why the rabbit took a nap?” “I know. I know” Dongdong says, leaning forward, and raising his hand. “Yes, Dongdong. Please tell us why” Ms. Sun says. “It is because the rabbit thought the turtle was very slow,” Dongdong answers. “Very good, Dongdong. Thank you for raising your hand. Let’s hear from another friend.”

During the interview, Ms. Sun described Dongdong as follows,

Dongdong is a child who has a mind of his own. He can think independently and he is intrigued by many things. He is always very eager to express himself. One day when he was absent, I could feel that the classroom was much quieter when I asked questions. (Except from interview, 7-20-10)

When I asked if it is important for children to follow the rules such as raising hands before answering the questions, Ms. Sun said,

Well, I think it is important. In this case, I think he just got very excited and got carried away. That is okay. He is just a child. I did not call on him at first because I wanted him to realize that he needed to raise his hand. I called on him after he raised his hand because I wanted to reward him with an opportunity to answer.

Teachers indicated even though discipline is important, raising hands is encouraged before children speak up, but it is not enough to discourage them from answering questions. “It is natural that they just got excited and forget about raising their

hands. I would remind them but will not go that far to forbid them to answer the questions.” (Excerpt from interview, 7-20-10)

Teachers said that they do not value children obeying them. Children should listen to the teacher because they think the teacher is right. If children do not agree with the teacher, children should be able to express their opinions freely.

Teachers further suggested that obedience is no longer valued because it is not a quality that can help one succeed in the current Chinese society.

In Chinese society right now, to succeed is what counts. We are preparing children to succeed in this society. And following rules or listening to the teachers is not something that will help you succeed. In fact, people who follow rules are not the ones who are successful. Those who are successful are the ones who know how to work around the rules or do not follow the rules. (Excerpt from interview with Ms. Sun, 07-20-10)

Whether following rules is important varies with different teachers. Some teachers believed that following rules is important.

If the child does not play by the rules, he cannot work with others, and nobody wants to work with him. On a larger level, if the child breaks the rule now, he might break the law later when he grows up. (Excerpt from interview with Ms. Huang, 06-24-10)

Whether obeying rules is important depends on specific situations. For example, a child who did not want to take a nap made her case with the teacher. The teacher chose to respect this individual choice and make an exception for her in this case. However, in another scenario, when a child forgot to wear his red shirt for national flag-raising ceremony, he could have lost his regular spot in the line and stood at the very end of his class as a form of punishment, if his friend had not lend him a red shirt. It seems that when it matters to the group integrity, it is imperative that everyone respects the rules.

## **Discussion**

Both emerging values, such as individuality, independence, and optimism, and traditional Chinese values, such as collective spirit, responsibility, honesty, and collaboration, construct the meaning of a good child in Chinese teachers' perceptions. The meaning underlying each attribute, though, has been redefined and reconstructed in varying degrees. In this section, I address the meaning, the complexity, and the implications that come with this redefinition.

Much of the redefinition of meaning pertains to three dimensions: (a) a strong emphasis on the individuality, (b) a continuity of collective values, and (c) the tensions between individuality and collectivity.

### **Emphasis on Individuality**

There is a strong emphasis on individuality reflected in the arrangement of the classroom, teaching practices, as well as teachers' conceptions. The classroom now is set up with open space in the middle and Montessori materials stored on the fringes, which encourages children to make choices and work independently. The teaching approach has changed from didactic large group lessons to a more integrated curriculum, including child-initiated activities and teacher-facilitated group lessons. Teachers constantly stressed the importance of individual rights, independent thinking, creativity, and assertiveness in their narratives. All of these suggest an undeniable focus on individuality in the classroom as well as in teachers' beliefs.

### **Continuity of Collectivity**

Many Chinese traditional rituals and routines are still kept in the classrooms, either through teachers' conscious efforts or through "the working of informal unmarked

mechanism of transmission” (Tobin, 2009). For instance, children still stand up, and greet the teacher as a class to show their respect for the teacher; children still express their appreciation collectively by saying “thank you for your hard work, teacher” together before they start their meal; children still stand in line, and do group exercises as a class; and children still take turns at being on duty for chores for the entire class. Teachers also indicated their appreciation for and embrace of collective values.

### **Tensions between Individuality and Collectivity**

Even though individuality is strongly emphasized through teachers’ practice, it still has its limits in Chinese classrooms due to the resilience of collectivism. For example, individual identity is suppressed through collective activities that emphasize group identity and require uniformity, such as the national flag-raising ceremony and group performances. Individual identity is suppressed in these activities. Another example is children going to the toilet together as a class, where the toilets are long troughs with no doors and separations, which reflects the depreciation of privacy, an important aspect of individualism. On the other side of the same token, collectivity is also restrained due to the development of individuality in the classroom. For instance, as described in the vignette “care or not to care,” caring for others or helping others is no longer promoted as a selfless act. Instead, it is considered an individual choice or decision, even though it is encouraged. Another example along the same lines would be the vignette where the teacher discouraged the girl from helping her classmate clean up his mess because it was his responsibility, not hers. Both of these examples reflect the teacher’s emphasis on the equal rights of each individual. Thus the collective values are suppressed as a result of the development of individuality.

## **Complexity**

One issue that I encountered during analysis is the overlay of meaning between certain values. Individuality and independence both embody the meaning of independent thinking while collectivity and responsibility both encompass the facet of social responsibility or group responsibility. I would argue that this issue is inevitable due to the interrelated and intertwined relationships between these concepts. Specifically, the concept of independence stemmed from individualism while the concept responsibility derived from the collectivism as shown in the literature (see Hofstede, 1991; Triandis & Gelfand, 1998). Furthermore, the primary purpose of the interpretation is not to separate each construct; rather, it is to present them together to portray the meaning of a good child. I strived to represent the fullness and complexity of the meaning of each construct, without exploiting the teachers' perceptions.

## **Implications**

The redefinition of the meaning of a good child is also a reflection of what is happening in the larger context of Chinese society. The emphasis on individuality is congruent with the demands of the market economy in China. The advocacy of optimism is a result of an increasing rate of depression and suicide among children and teenagers. The stress on filial piety attends to a societal problem that more and more old parents are neglected by their adult children. The reinforcement of collectivity addresses the social concern of moral decline and collapse in Chinese society. It seems that what is happening in the larger context of Chinese society influences what is taught and what is valued in the classroom, while what is taught in the classroom, in response, is expected to change what is happening in the large society.

## CHAPTER 6

### SURVEY FINDINGS

The survey is composed of three parts: 30 Likert scale items, one rank question, and 10 demographics questions. The survey was developed based on the findings from interviews and observations in the present study as well as a pilot study and the related literature. It was designed to further confirm the findings by interviewing and observing a larger population of teachers, as well as examining the relationships between teachers' perceptions of a good child and their socio-demographic characteristics. Four hundred survey questionnaires were distributed to 20 public preschools and kindergarten in Harbin, China, and a total of 349 responses were collected. In this chapter, I will report the survey results in two parts: teachers' ratings on attributes of a good child (results from Likert scale data) and teachers' rankings on the importance of attributes of a good child (results from rank question data).

#### **Teachers Ratings on Attributes of a Good Child**

The survey consists of 30 items on a 7 point Likert Scale from 1 being strongly disagree to 7 being strongly agree. Specifically, these Likert scale items were developed primarily based on the seven constructs that were identified by teachers through observations and interviews. The survey was intended to address the research questions, what are teachers' perceptions of a good child, and how different teachers' perceptions of a good child are related to their age, academic degree, and working experience.

Out of the 349 survey responses collected, 329 were used as input for further analysis. 20 of the surveys are missing answers to 10 or more questions, so they were discarded. There are 127 missing values on 30 scale question items. The Little's missing

completely at random (MCAR) test was performed on the missing data with the null hypothesis being that the data was missing randomly. The result shows that with significance of 0.13, it does not reject the null hypothesis completely, so it is probably acceptable to assume that the data was missing randomly. Then the Expectation-Maximization (EM) algorithm was performed to fill in the missing data with imputed values (Schafer, 1997, 1999; Schafer & Olsen, 1998).

### **Reliability for Likert Scale Items: Cronbach's alpha**

The Likert scale contains eight subscales. Internal consistencies (Cronbach's alpha) were computed for each component and the total scale, as shown in the table below. The internal consistency reliability of the total scale is very high in the present study ( $\alpha = .95$ ), indicating very good reliability. Item-total correlation coefficients range from .70 to .84, indicating an at least acceptable reliability, as shown in Table 6.1.

### **Validity for Likert Scale Items: Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)**

The seven Likert scale questionnaires can be considered as a six-factor model, even though they consist of eight subscales: Individuality, Independence, Optimism, Collaboration, Collectivity, Responsibility, Honesty and Obedience. The items that are associated with Obedience and Honesty are not considered as part of the model, primarily because of two reasons. First, based on the findings from the pilot study, as well as from observation and interviews in the present study, obedience is no longer considered as one of the attributes that a good child should have. The item of Obedience is included in the survey mostly to compare with previous studies that indicated obedience as one of the desirable qualities in Chinese children. Second, for a similar reason, honesty, was not brought up by Chinese teachers as one of the desirable qualities, even though it was

valued in Chinese tradition. Honesty, which contains 2 items, was included mostly for the purpose of comparing and contrasting with previous findings. The other six components (Individuality, Independence, Optimism, Collaboration, Collectivity, and Responsibility) are considered to be “what constitutes a good child in China.”

Table 6.1. Reliability

	Mean	SD	Alpha
Individuality	19.62	4.33	.83
Independence	14.49	3.31	.80
Collaboration	28.92	6.44	.84
Collectivity	14.17	3.24	.70
Optimism	19.62	4.11	.78
Responsibility	15.49	3.53	.80
Honesty	9.48	2.49	.73
Obedience	16.96	4.08	.71
Total Scale	138.75	25.62	.95

A confirmatory factor analysis using AMOs 21 was conducted on the entire sample (n=329). Results confirmed that the six-factor model could be considered as a relatively adequate model,  $\chi^2=624.04$ ,  $df=194$ ,  $\chi^2/df=3.22$ , CFI=.90, RMSEA=.08. The Goodness-of-fit index was .86, which is close to the cutoff .90 and can be considered acceptable with sample size over 250. (Hair et al., 2009). RMSEA is a little above the conventionally accepted  $\leq .06$  cutoff and CFI fell a little short of the conventionally



accepted .95 cutoff. However, As Browne and Cudeck (1993) proposed that RMSEA values less than 0.08 suggest an adequate model fit (i.e., a "reasonable error of approximation," p. 144) while CFI value in the range of .90-.95 could be considered indicative of acceptable model fit (e.g., Bentler, 1990), the current model could be considered as an adequate fit.

A second CFA was run and four items with comparatively low factor loadings were removed. The fit of this model became good,  $\chi^2 (120) = 277.12$ ,  $p < .001$ ; TLI=.94, CFI = .95; RMSEA= 0.06. Goodness-of-fit index was .92, which is now above .90 cutoff. As Hu and Bentler (1999) pointed out, in the instances where RMSEA values are close to .06 or below and CFI and TLI values are close to .95 or greater support a reasonably good fit between the target model and the observed data. The second CFA model is considered as a reasonable good fit and could be used for future use.

### **Overview of Teachers' Ratings on Attributes**

As shown in Table 6.2, the items associated with Responsibility were rated highest among all the qualities with Mean=5.16 (SD=1.18). Among the 30 items, item 13 (A good child should be responsible for his own actions) and item 17 (A good child should have responsibility) have the highest mean (Mean@13= 5.26, SD=1.34) (Mean@17=5.22, SD=1.34).

The items associated with Obedience and Conformity were rated lowest among all the qualities with (Mean=4.25, SD=1.27), (Mean=4.23, SD=1.13), respectively.

Table 6.2. Descriptive Statistics

	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev
Individuality	329	1.67	7.00	4.83	1.10
Independence	329	1.33	7.00	4.72	1.08
Collaboration	329	1.40	7.00	4.94	1.14
Collectivity	329	1.33	7.00	4.72	1.08
Optimism	329	1.25	7.00	4.90	1.02
Responsibility	329	1.33	7.00	5.16	1.17
Honesty	329	1.00	7.00	4.71	1.24

### **Do Teachers' Conceptions Differ Based on Their Age?**

The youngest teacher who participated in survey is 16 years old and the oldest is 56 years old. The average age is 27 years old. The majority of the teachers are between 20 years and 30 years of age.

Spearman's rho test was conducted to examine whether there is an association between teachers' age and all the Likert scale items. The results showed that all the items are associated with age at a 0.05 significance level except for those related to Obedience (questions 20 and 25).

To better address the research questions, teachers were grouped according to their birth decade: the 90s generation, the 80s generation, the 70s generation, and the 60 generation. The reason being concerned with age is that China was undergoing significant social, cultural, and economic reforms in the past forty years (e.g., the Cultural Revolution in the 60s-70s, and the Reforms and Openings in the 80s-90s), and we suspect

that the teachers' perceptions could also have been changing over time. As shown in figure 6.1, about 62 percent of teachers were born between 1980 and 1989, or we call them the Post-80s generation in China. About 19 percent of the teachers are between 30 years and 40 years old, born between 1970 and 1979, which we call the Post-70s generation. About 15 percent of the teachers are less than 20 years old, meaning they were born after 1990 and we call them the Post-90s generation. About 5 percent of the teachers were older than 40 years old, and they are called them the Post-60s generation.

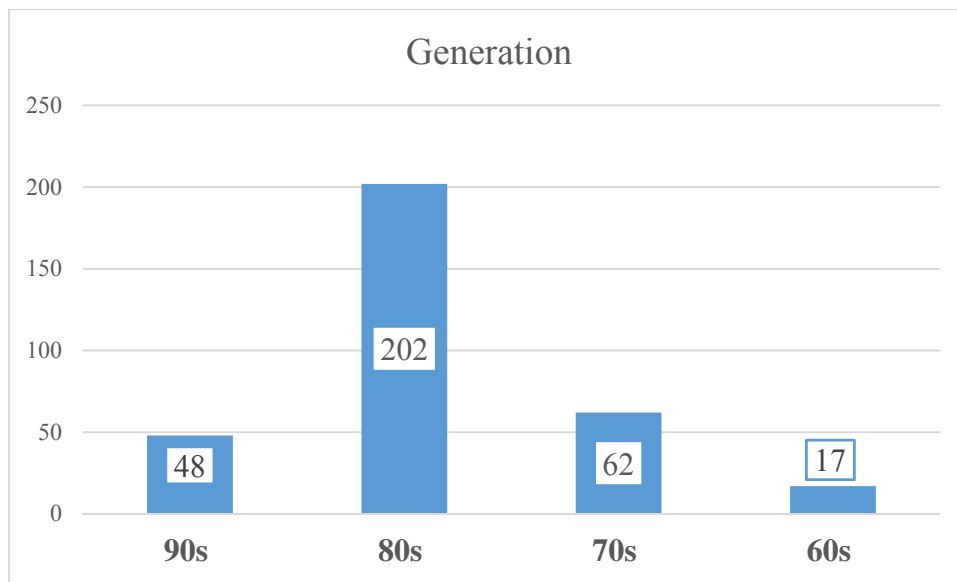


Figure 6.1. The Frequency Statistics of Teachers Based on Generation

Kruskal-Wallis H tests were performed to further examine whether there are significant differences in the ratings of teachers across four generations (60s, 70s, 80s, and 90s). The results suggested that there are significant differences in the teachers' ratings on all the attributes except Obedience, depending on the teachers' generation, as shown in the Table 6.3 below.

The results demonstrated an interesting pattern. Teachers born in the 90s tended to rate significantly lower than teachers born in the 80s, 70s, and 60s on all the attributes except Obedience. Teachers born in the 70s tended to rate significantly higher than teachers born in the 90s, 80s, and 60s on all the attributes except Obedience. For teachers from the 90s generation to the 70s generation, their rating scores got higher with their generation, which means the 80s generation teachers tended to rate significantly higher than the 90s generation, while the 70s generation rated significantly higher than the 80s generation on all the attributes except Obedience. Teachers from the 60s generation, however, did not follow this pattern. They tended to rate lower than the 70s generation on all the attributes except Obedience while rating higher on all the attributes with exception of Obedience than teachers from the 90s generation.

A series of separate KW tests were conducted to further explore the differences in teachers' ratings between different generation groups (such as between the 90s and 80s, the 80s and 70s, the 70s and 60s, the 90s and 70s, the 90s and 60s, the 80s and 60s).

Between teachers from the 90s generation and from the 80s generation, the results showed that there are significant differences in their ratings on the items of seven attributes: Individuality, Independence, Collectivity, Collaboration, Optimism, Responsibility, and Honesty. Teachers from the 80s generation tended to rate significantly higher than teachers from the 90s on these seven attributes. There are no significant differences on the attributes Obedience and Conformity.

Between teachers from the 80s generation and the 70s generation, the results suggested there are significant differences in teachers' ratings on the items of all the attributes except Obedience. Teachers from the 70s generation tended to rate Obedience

significantly higher than teachers from the 80s. Similar to that, between teachers from the 90s generation and those from the 70s generation, there are also significant differences in teachers' ratings on all the attributes except Obedience ( $p=.00<.05$ ). Teachers from the 70s generation tended to rate Obedience higher than those from the 90s generation.

Table 6.3. KW Tests on Generation

	90s	80s	70s	60s	Chi-
	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Square
	(n=48)	(n=202)	(n=62)	(n=17)	
Individuality	4.27	4.86	5.14	4.94	19.75*
Independence	4.25	4.71	5.12	4.74	20.70*
Collaboration	4.45	4.96	5.30	4.93	20.89*
Collectivity	4.25	4.71	5.12	4.74	20.70*
Optimism	4.55	4.87	5.23	5.15	17.10*
Responsibility	4.86	5.13	5.54	5.02	15.64*
Honesty	4.08	4.73	5.18	5.15	22.55*
Obedience	4.34	4.27	4.08	4.38	.52
Conformity	3.94	4.15	4.49	5.03	17.21*

Note. \* $p<.05$

Between teachers from the 90s generation and the 60s generation, there are significant differences in their ratings on Individuality ( $X^2 = 4.77$ ,  $p = .03 < .05$ ), Optimism ( $X^2 = 3.74$ ,  $p = .05$ ), Honesty ( $X^2 = 8.62$ ,  $p = .00 < .05$ ), and Conformity ( $X^2 = 13.1$ ,  $p = .00 < .05$ ). Teachers from the 60s generation tended to rate higher than teachers from the 90s generation on these four attributes.

There are no significant differences found in their ratings between teachers from the 70s generation and the 60s generation on all the attributes. There are no significant differences found in their ratings between teachers from the 80s generation and the 60s generation on all the attributes except Conformity ( $X^2 = 9.47$ ,  $p = .00 < .05$ ). On the items of Conformity, teachers from the 60s generation (Mean rank=154.94) tended to rate significantly higher than the teachers from the 80s generation (Mean rank=106.22).

### **Do Teachers Perceptions Differ Based on Their Academic Degree?**

Among 329 teachers, 141 teachers (about 42 percent) have a three-year associate degree, 113 teachers (about 34 percent) have a four-year bachelor's degree, 72 teachers (about 21 percent) have a two-year associate degree, and 2 teachers (about 1 percent) have a master's degree, as shown in the Figure 6.2 below. Due to the small sample size of teachers with master degrees, the teachers with master degrees are combined with teachers with bachelor degrees.

Kruskal-Wallis H tests were conducted to further examine whether there are significant differences in the ratings of teachers based on their final academic degree. The results showed that there are significant differences in teachers' ratings on all the attributes, except Obedience, based on their academic degree. For teachers with a two-year degree to a bachelor's degree, the higher the teachers' degrees are, the higher they tended to rate all the items, except Conformity.

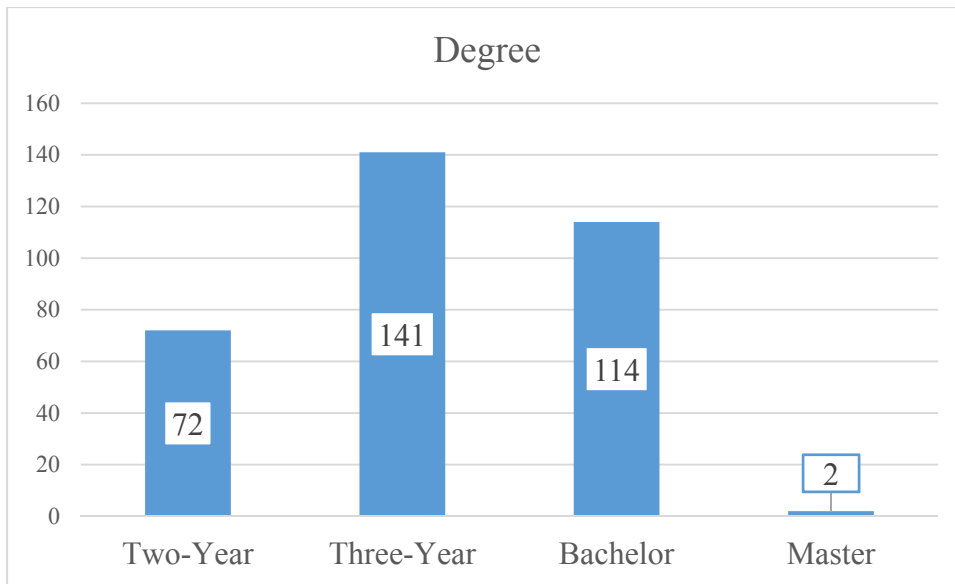


Figure 6.2. The Frequency Statistics of Teachers Based on Degree

A series of separate KW tests was performed to further explore the patterns in teachers' ratings based on their academic degrees, as shown in Table 6.4.

Between teachers with a two-year degree and teachers with a three-year degree, there are only significant differences in teachers' ratings on Individuality ( $X^2 = 3.72$ ,  $p = .05$ ). Teachers with a three-year degree tended to rate higher on the items of Individuality than teachers with a two-year degree.

Between teachers with a two year degree and teachers with a bachelor's degree, there are significant differences in teachers' ratings on all the attributes except Obedience. Similar to that, between teachers with a three year degree and teachers with a bachelor's degree, there are also significant differences in teachers' ratings on all the attributes except Obedience.

There are no significant differences between teachers with a three year degree and teachers with a bachelor's degree on all the attributes.

Table 6.4. KW Tests on Degree (N=329)

	Two-Year	Three-year	Bachelor	Chi-
	Mean	Mean	Mean	Square
	(n=72)	(n=141)	(n=116)	
Individuality	4.27	4.86	5.23	23.74*
Independence	4.25	4.71	5.12	25.04*
Collaboration	4.45	4.96	5.23	14.71*
Collectivity	4.25	4.71	5.12	25.04*
Optimism	4.55	4.87	5.18	13.57*
Responsibility	4.86	5.13	5.52	19.40*
Honesty	4.08	4.73	5.14	23.80*
Obedience	4.34	4.27	4.29	1.24
Conformity	3.94	4.15	4.55	16.63*

Note. \*p<.05

### **Do Teachers' Beliefs Differ Based on Their Working Experience?**

Among 329 teachers, about half of them have less than 3 years of working experience, as shown in Figure 6.3. About 30 percent of the teachers have 3 to 10 years of working experience. About 25 percent have more than 10 years of working experience. The shortest time is half a year and the longest working experience is 39 years. The average length of working experience is 7 years.





Figure 6.3. The Frequency Statistics of Teachers Based on Working Experience

According to the Spearman's rho test, teachers' working experience is positively correlated with their rankings on eight attributes, Individuality ( $r = .22$ ,  $p = .00 < .01$ ), Independence ( $r = .25$ ,  $p = .00 < .01$ ), Collaboration ( $r = .27$ ,  $p = .00 < .01$ ), Collectivity ( $r = .25$ ,  $p = .00 < .01$ ), Optimism ( $r = .29$ ,  $p = .00 < .01$ ), Responsibility ( $r = .22$ ,  $p = .00 < .01$ ), Honesty ( $r = .31$ ,  $p = .00 < .01$ ), and Conformity ( $r = .26$ ,  $p = .00 < .01$ ). The results suggest that teachers with longer working experience tended to rate significantly higher on all the attributes except Obedience.

The teachers are grouped into three categories based on the length of their working experience: less than 3 years, 3-10 years, and more than 10 years. A KW test was performed to test whether there are statistically significant differences in their ratings on the attributes among these three groups. Consistent with Spearman's rho test, the KW test also showed that there are statistically significant differences in teachers' ratings among the three groups on all the attributes except Obedience, as shown in Table 6.5.

A series of KW tests was performed to further explore the relationships between different working experience groups, as shown in Table 6.6. Between teachers with less than 3 years of working experience and teachers with 3 to 10 years of working experience, the results showed that there are statistically significant differences in their ratings on all the attributes except Conformity.

Between teachers with 3 to 10 years of working experience and teachers with more than 10 years of working experience, the results showed that there are statistically significant differences in their ratings on all the attributes except Individuality and Obedience.

Between teachers with less than 3 years of working experience and teachers with more than 10 years of working experience, the results showed that there are statistically significant differences in their ratings on all the attributes except Obedience.

### **Do Teachers' Beliefs Differ Based on Other Factors?**

**Overview of other demographics variables.** Among 329 valid surveys, 197 teachers answered the complete demographical questions while 255 teachers completed all but professional development questions. One of the possible reasons for missing some demographic information could be due to that it was the last page of the entire questionnaire. The age, degree, and working experience are the first three demographic questions, which made them the most likely to be filled out.

One possible reason for teachers leaving blanks on the professional development question could be that they have not attended any professional development workshops or conferences. The detailed descriptive information about other demographics is shown in the Table 6.7.

Table 6.5. KW Tests on Working Experience (N=329)

	Less than 3 Year Mean (n=144)	3-10 Year Mean (n=105)	More than 10 Year Mean (n=80)	Chi- Square
Individuality	4.61	4.88	5.17	14.53*
Independence	4.45	4.77	5.15	21.24*
Collaboration	4.66	4.98	5.44	28.63*
Collectivity	4.45	4.77	5.15	21.24*
Optimism	4.64	4.87	5.43	36.66*
Responsibility	4.94	5.11	5.62	21.81*
Honesty	4.34	4.75	5.45	40.98*
Obedience	4.38	4.08	4.24	3.51
Conformity	4.03	4.06	4.81	30.72*

*Note.* \*p<.05

Table 6.6. KW Tests on Comparison of Rating between Subgroups of Working Experience

	Less than 3 years and from 3 to 10 years	From 3 to 10 years and more than 10 years	Less than 3 years and more than 10 years
Individuality	4.61*	2.37	14.28*
Independence	5.75*	4.22*	21.34*
Collaboration	8.27*	9.10*	25.50*
Collectivity	5.75*	4.22*	21.34*
Optimism	6.82*	13.96*	34.74*
Responsibility	3.42	10.10*	20.00*
Honesty	8.00*	15.43*	38.61*
Obedience	3.87*	1.09	.040
Conformity	.07	20.37*	28.15*

*Note.* \*p<.05

Table 6.7. Detailed Descriptive Information about Demographics

	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Internet	255	1.00	4.00	1.70	.71
Journal	255	.00	50.00	3.53	4.77
Kids	255	1	2	1.62	.49
Gender	255	1	2	1.04	.20
Professional Development	197	3.00	305.00	29.38	36.32

**Internet.** About 44 percent of teachers use Internet at least once every day and about 44 percent of teachers use Internet at least once a week. About 11 percent of the teachers use Internet once a month and only 1 percent of the teachers use Internet once a year. The median frequency for teachers to use Internet is at least once a week.

Teachers were categorized in to three groups based on the frequency of their use of Internet: at least once per day, once per week, and once a month or longer. Kruskal-Wallis H test results suggest that there are only statistically significant differences in teachers' ratings on Collectivity between those using Internet everyday and the others ( $X^2(197, 2) = 6.68, p = .04 < .05$ ). More specifically, the teachers who used Internet everyday tended to rate higher on Collectivity than those who used Internet weekly or monthly.

**Journal.** On average, every teacher checked out 3 to 4 professional journals per month. About 76 percent of the teachers (193 teachers) checked out one to three professional journals every month. Specifically, about 34 percent of the teachers checked

out one professional journal per month; about 25 percent checked out two professional journals per month; about 16 percent read three professional journals per month. About 11 percent of the teachers read over 10 professional journals every month.

Kruskal-Wallis H test results suggest that there are no statistically significant differences in any of the teachers' ratings with respect to their journal readership.

**Professional development.** About 26 percent of the teachers have attended professional development workshops or sessions in 2010, about 26 percent in 2009, about 10 percent in 2008, about 15 percent between 2000 and 2007, and about 2 percent attended professional development workshops before 2000. One teacher reported that the last time she attended professional development workshop was in 1985. All other teachers attended professional development workshops between 1996 and 2010. About 22 percent of teachers left it blank which could indicate that they never attended any professional workshops for only selected public preschool teachers could go to professional workshops.

The teachers were categorized into four groups based on the last time they attended professional development workshops. Kruskal-Wallis H test results suggest that there are statistically significant differences in teachers' ratings on Obedience and Conformity with respect to the last time they attended professional development workshops. Results ( $X^2(197, 3) = 12.34, p = .01 < .05$ ) indicate that teachers who attended professional development workshops in 2010 (Mean rank=86.48) tended to rate Obedience significantly lower than teachers who attended professional development workshops in 2009 (Mean rank=104.95), and the latter in turn tended to give significantly lower ratings than teachers who attended in 2008 (Mean rank=130.83). In other words,

the teachers who attended professional development workshops more recently tended not to value Obedience as much as others. Similarly, there are also statistical significance in teachers' ratings on Conformity ( $X^2 (197, 3) = 9.17, p = .03 < .05$ ), suggesting the more recent the teachers attended professional workshops, the lower score they tended to give to Conformity. Teachers who attended professional development workshops in 2010 (Mean rank=81.95) tended to rate Obedience significantly lower than those who attended professional development workshops in 2009 (Mean rank=106.51) and in 2008 (Mean rank=106.75).

**Kids and gender.** About 38 percent of the teachers have kids on their own. About 4 percent of the teachers are male while 96 percent are female.

Kruskal-Wallis H tests were used to compare the group means of ratings from those who have their own children and those who do not on all eight constructs. Results ( $X^2 (255, 1) = 4.64, p = .03 < .05$ ) indicated that teachers who have children (Mean Rank=140.46) tended to rate higher on the items related to Honesty than those who do not have children (Mean Rank=120.22). KW tests were also used to compare the group means of female teachers and male teachers. Results ( $X^2 (255, 1) = 3.74, p = .05$ ) showed that male teachers (Mean Rank=169.91) tended to rate higher on the items related to Individuality than female teachers (Mean Rank=126.11).

### **Teachers' Rankings of Importance of Attributes**

The teachers were asked to rank ten qualities (Individuality, Obedience, Responsibility, Honesty, Independence, Collectivity, Compassion, Collaboration, Optimism, and Conformity) based on an importance scale from 1 to 10, with 1 being the most important quality and 10 being the least important quality. Among the 349 collected

questionnaires, only 243 were processed for further analysis. The other 102 survey responses were incomplete in the ranking part and thus discarded. Optimism and Responsibility have the smallest mean among ten qualities, which could indicate a relatively higher rank by the majority of the teachers, while Conformity has the largest mean, which could suggest a comparatively lower rank by these teachers, as shown in the Table 6.8 below.

Table 6.8. Descriptive Statistics

	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Optimism	243	1.00	10.00	4.02	2.74
Responsibility	243	1.00	10.00	4.05	2.66
Individuality	243	1.00	10.00	4.50	2.67
Honesty	243	1.00	10.00	4.99	2.89
Compassion	243	1.00	10.00	4.95	2.14
Collaboration	243	1.00	10.00	5.09	2.42
Independence	243	1.00	10.00	6.12	2.28
Obedience	243	1.00	10.00	6.49	3.17
Collectivity	243	1.00	10.00	6.86	2.94
Conformity	243	1.00	10.00	7.64	2.21



### The Most Important Quality Teachers Prefer in a Good Child

Optimism was ranked most frequently by teachers as the most important quality among the ten qualities, as shown in Figure 6.4. Fifty two teachers ranked optimism as the most important quality. Responsibility, being the second most frequently ranked, was ranked by forty nine teachers as the most important quality. Honesty was ranked by thirty eight teachers as the most important quality, being the third most frequently ranked.

The least frequently ranked as the most important qualities by teachers are Discipline (following rules) and Independence. Among the 243 teachers, only four teachers ranked Discipline as the most important quality, and seven teachers ranked Independence as the most important quality.



Figure 6.4. The Most Important Qualities That Teachers Prefer in a Good Child

### The Top Three Most Important Qualities Teachers Prefer in a Child

The top three ranked qualities are Responsibility, Optimism, and Individuality as shown in the Figure 6.5 below.

Responsibility was ranked first (the most important quality), second (the second most important quality), and third (the third most important quality) by 130 teachers (about 54 percent). 127 teachers (about 52 percent) ranked Optimism as one of top three most important qualities. And 103 (about 42 percent) teachers ranked Individuality as one of the top three most important qualities.

The least ranked qualities are Discipline (following rules) and Independence. Only 10 teachers (about 4 percent of teachers) ranked Discipline as the first, second, and third most important qualities.

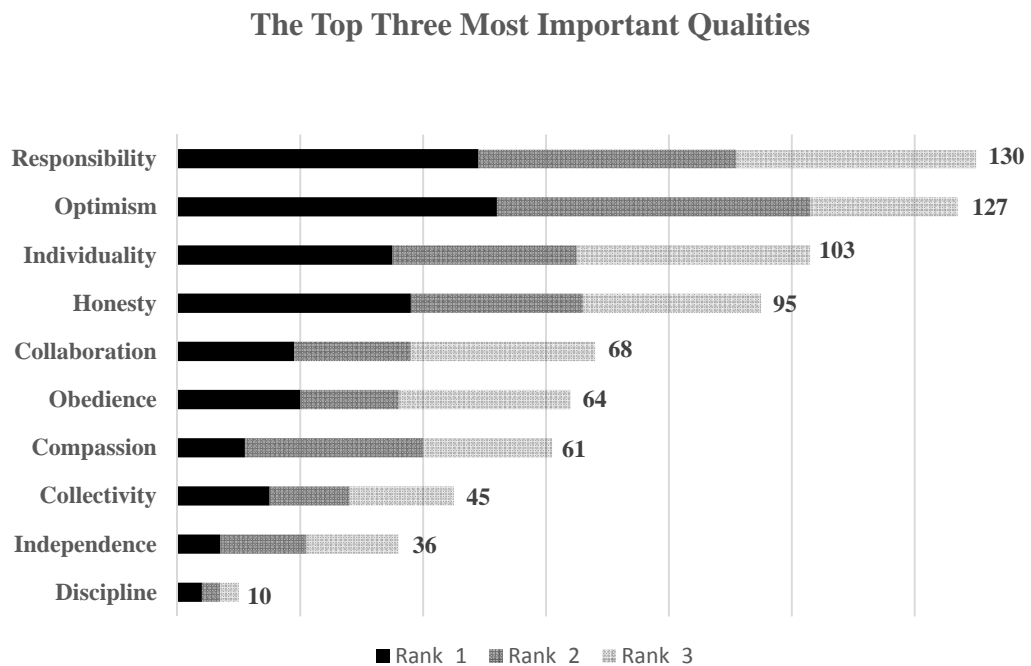


Figure 6.5. The Top Three Most Important Qualities That Teachers Prefer in a Good Child

### **Are Teachers' Rankings Associated with Their Age and Working Experience?**

Spearman's rho test results showed that teachers' age in China was associated with six qualities at .05 significance level. There was a significantly positive relationship between teachers' age and two qualities: Obedience ( $r = .52, p = .00 < .05$ ) and Discipline ( $r = .32, p = .00 < .05$ ), while there was a significantly negative relationship between teachers' age and four qualities: Responsibility ( $r = -.39, p = .00 < .01$ ), Collaboration ( $r = -.28, p = .00 < .01$ ), Compassion ( $r = -.17, p = .01 < .05$ ), and Independence ( $r = -.16, p = .01 < .05$ ),

The younger the teacher, the higher they ranked Obedience and Discipline (following rules), or in other words, the more they valued Obedience and Discipline as important qualities. The older the teacher, the higher they ranked Responsibility, Collaboration, Compassion and Independence as important qualities, and the more they valued these qualities.

Spearman's rho test results showed teachers' working experience in China was associated with four qualities at .05 significance level and one quality at .05 significance level. There was a significantly positive relationship between teachers' working experience and two qualities: obedience ( $r = .44, p = .00 < .05$ ) and discipline ( $r = .29, p = .00 < .05$ ), while there was a significantly negative relationship between teachers' age and three qualities: responsibility ( $r = -.38, p = .00 < .01$ ), collaboration ( $r = -.25, p = .00 < .01$ ), and independence ( $r = -.15, p = .02 < .05$ ),

The shorter the teachers' working years, the higher they ranked obedience and discipline, meaning the less time the teachers worked, the more they valued Obedience

and Discipline. The longer the teachers worked, the higher they ranked Responsibility, Collaboration and Independence as important qualities.

Table 6.9. Spearman's rho Correlations Coefficients

	age	working years
Obedience	.52*	.44*
Discipline	.32*	.29*
Responsibility	-.39*	-.38*
Collaboration	-.28*	-.25*
Compassion	-.17**	.11
Independence	-.16*	-.15*

Note. \*p<.05

### Are Teachers' Rankings Associated with Their Education Level?

Spearman's rho test results showed the teachers' degree was associated with five qualities at .05 significance level, as shown in Table 6.10. There was a significantly positive correlation between teachers' degrees and two qualities: Optimism ( $r = .35$ ,  $p = .00 < .05$ ) and Obedience ( $r = .28$ ,  $p = .00 < .05$ ), while there was a significantly negative relationship between teachers' degrees and three qualities: collectivity ( $r = -.23$ ,  $p = .00 < .05$ ), honesty ( $r = -.16$ ,  $p = .02 < .05$ ), and responsibility ( $r = -.14$ ,  $p = .03 < .05$ ). The results suggested that the higher the teachers' education level, the lower they tended to rank optimism and obedience, meaning the less they valued optimism and obedience; while the higher the teachers' educational level, the higher they tended to rank

collectivity, honesty and responsibility, meaning the more they valued collectivity, honesty and responsibility.

Table 6.10. Spearman's rho Correlations Coefficients

	Degree
Optimism	.35*
Obedience	.28*
Collectivity	-.23*
Honesty	-.16*
Responsibility	-.14*

*Note.* \* $p < .05$

KW tests were also performed to explore the differences in teachers' rankings on Optimism, Obedience, and Collectivity among the four groups based on the teachers' educational background, as shown in Table 6.10. Consistent with Spearman's rho tests, significant differences were found in teachers' rankings on Optimism, Obedience, Collectivity, Honesty and Responsibility.

**Obedience.** Obedience comparatively higher than the teachers with a three-year degree (Mean rank=119.69). And the teachers with a three-year degree tended to rank obedience higher than the teachers with a bachelor's degree (Mean rank=140.00).

The results suggested that that the teachers with two-year degrees tended to rank Obedience on the top of scale, being the most important quality while the teachers with three-year degrees and bachelor's degrees tended to rank it on the bottom of the scale, being the least important quality.

Table 6.11. KW Test on Degree (N=243)

	Two- Year Mean (N=48)	Three-Year Mean (N=81)	Bachelor Mean (N=114)	Chi- Square
Individuality	4.27	4.14	4.85	6.84
Obedience	4.75	6.42	7.26	27.06*
Responsibility	4.65	4.21	3.68	4.99
Honesty	5.38	5.51	4.46	7.38
Collectivity	7.44	7.48	6.17	14.90*
Independence	6.23	6.35	5.90	3.21
Compassion	5.10	4.96	4.88	1.47
Collaboration	5.33	5.22	4.89	2.55
Optimism	3.27	2.93	5.11	36.31*
Conformity	7.69	7.65	7.61	0.20

Note. \*p<.05

As shown in the Figure 6.6 below, about half of the teachers with two-year degrees ranked Obedience between 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>, as the most important quality (Median=3.5, Mean=4.75, SD=3.08). About half of the teachers with three-year degrees ranked Obedience on the very bottom of the scale, between 7<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>, as the least important quality (Median=7.00, Mean=6.42, SD=2.49). Similarly, over the half of the

teachers with bachelor's degrees and master degrees ranked Obedience between 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> as the least important quality (Median=8.00, Mean=7.26, SD=3.02).

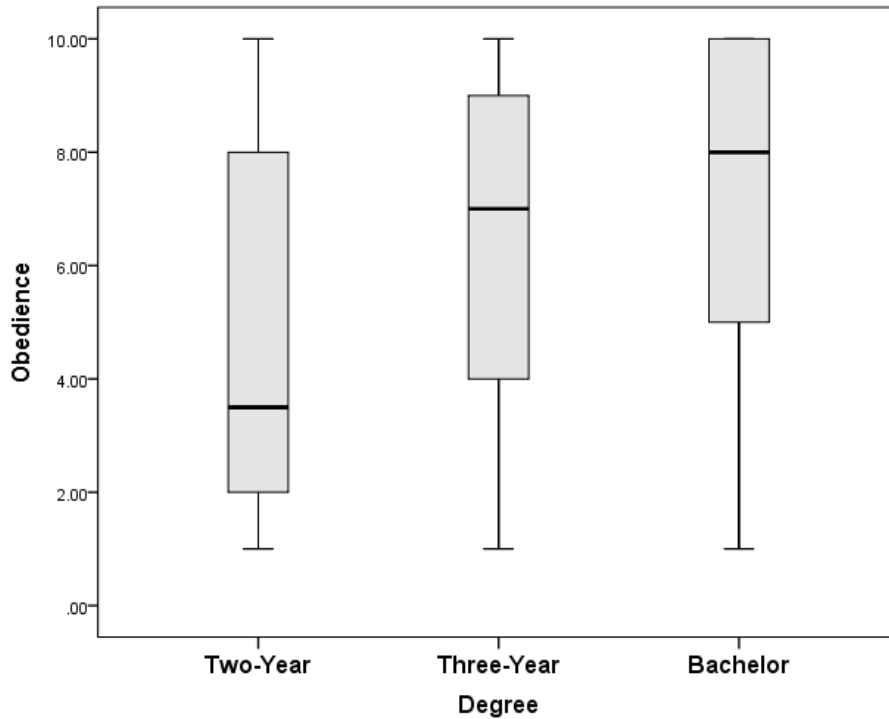


Figure 6.6. Ranking of Obedience Based on Teachers' Education Background

**Optimism.** According to the results of Kruskal-Wallis H test, the lower the teachers' educational level, the higher they tended to rank Optimism ( $\chi^2 (243, 3) = 34.62$ ,  $p = .00 < .05$ ). The teachers with two-year degrees (Mean rank=102.04) and three-year degrees (Mean rank=94.75) tended to rank Optimism comparatively higher than the teachers with bachelor's degrees (Mean rank=149.76).

As shown in the Figure 6.7 below, 80% of the teachers with two-year degrees ranked Optimism between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> most important qualities (Median=2.00, Mean=3.27, SD=2.46); while 80% of teachers with three-year degrees ranked Optimism between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> most important qualities (Median=2.00, Mean=2.93, SD=2.13).

For the teachers with bachelor's degrees and master degrees, they ranked Optimism mostly between the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> most important qualities (Median=5.00, Mean=5.11, SD=2.85).

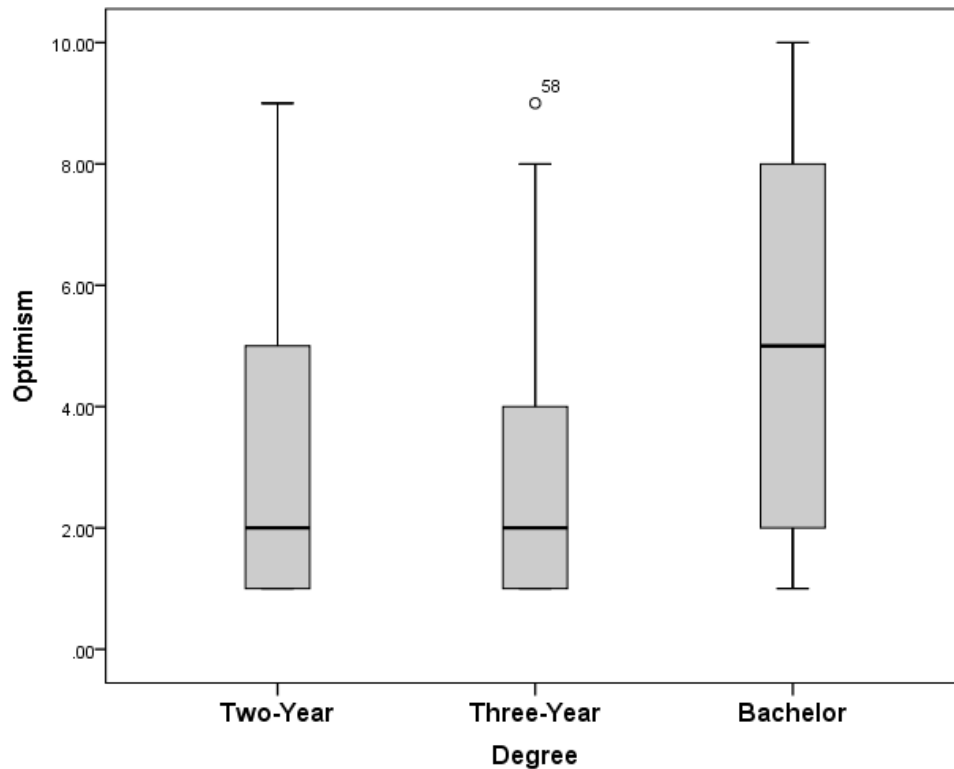


Figure 6.7. Ranking of Optimism Based on Teachers' Education Background

**Collectivity.** The results suggest that there is a decrease of emphasis in teachers' rankings on the quality of Collectivity with the increase of teachers' educational level. Significant differences were found in teachers' rankings on Collectivity among four groups depending on the teachers' educational background ( $X^2(243, 3) = 14.90, p = .00 < .05$ ). The teachers with two-year degrees (Mean rank=138.11) and the teachers with three-year degrees (Mean rank=136.58) tended to rank Collectivity relatively lower than the teachers with bachelor's degrees (Mean rank=104.86).



**Honesty.** There was a slight increase on the teachers' ranking of honesty with the increase of their educational level. The teachers with bachelor's and master's degrees ranked honesty relatively higher than the teachers with two-year and three-year degrees. The teachers with two-year degrees (Median=6.0, Mean=5.38, SD=2.97) ranked honesty similar to the teachers with three-year degrees (Median=6.00, Mean=5.51, SD=3.00). Over the half of teachers with bachelor's degrees ranked honesty between 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> as the most important quality (Median=4.00, Mean=4.48, SD=2.72). The teachers with master's degrees ranked honesty as 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> (Median=3.00, Mean=3.00, SD=1.41).

**Responsibility.** There was a slight but significant increase in teachers' rankings on responsibility with the increase of teachers' education level. The higher the teachers' education level, the higher they would rank responsibility.

About a little less than half of the teachers with two-year degrees ranked responsibility between 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> as the most important quality (Median=4.5, Mean=4.65, SD=2.85). Similarly, about half of teachers with three-year degrees also ranked collectivity between 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> (Median=4.00, Mean=4.21, SD=2.63). About two thirds of the teachers with bachelor's degrees ranked collectivity between 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> as the most important quality (Median=3.00, Mean=3.66, SD=2.53). The teachers with master's degrees ranked responsibility as 1<sup>st</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> (Median=4.50, Mean=4.50, SD=4.95).

### **Are Teachers' Rankings Associated with Their Generation?**

To better address the research questions, teachers were grouped according to their generation: 90s, 80s, 70s and 60s. KW tests were performed to examine whether there are significant differences among the four generation groups. The results suggested that there are significant differences in teachers' rankings on Obedience, Responsibility,

Independence, Collaboration and Conformity among the four generation groups, as shown in Table 6.11.

**Obedience.** The results suggested there are significant differences in obedience among the four groups depending on the teachers' generation ( $X^2(243, 3) = 52.31, p = .00 < .05$ ). The teachers who are in the 90s generation (Mean rank=56.26) tended to rank obedience comparatively higher than the teachers who are in the 80s generation (Mean rank=117.79), the teachers who are in the 70s generation (Mean rank=167.31), and the teachers who are in the 60s generation (Mean rank=127.66).

As shown in the Figure 6.8 below, the majority of teachers from the 70s generation ranked Obedience considerably lower than the other groups. Specifically, about 80% of the teachers of the 70s generation ranked Obedience between 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> (Median=9.00, Mean=8.22, SD=2.76) while about 80% of teachers of the 90s generation ranked Obedience between 1<sup>st</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> (Median=3.00, Mean=3.35, SD=2.74); about 80% of the teachers of the 80s generation ranked Obedience between 4<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> (Median=8.00, Mean=7.13, SD=2.75); and about 80% of teachers of the 60s generation ranked Obedience between 5<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> (Median=8.00, Mean=7.13, SD=2.75).

**Responsibility.** There were significant differences in teachers' ranking of Responsibility among the four groups depending on their generation ( $X^2(243, 3) = 20.66, p = .000 < .05$ ). The younger the generation the teachers belong to, the lower they ranked Responsibility. The teachers who are in the 90s generation (Mean rank=157.94) tended to rank Responsibility much lower than the teachers who are in the 80s generation (Mean rank=128.07), which ranked Responsibility much lower than the teachers who are in the 70s generation (Mean rank=96.94) and the teachers who are in the 60s generation

(Mean rank=86.97). In other words, the older generation the teachers belong to, the higher they ranked Responsibility, meaning the more they valued responsibility.

Table 6.12. KW Test across Generation Groups (N=243)

	90s	80s	70s	60s	Chi-
	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Square
	(N=31)	(N=140)	(N=56)	(N=16)	
Individuality	4.39	4.64	4.41	3.81	1.34
Obedience	3.35	6.34	8.39	7.13	52.31*
Responsibility	5.32	4.31	3.02	2.88	20.66*
Honesty	4.87	5.14	4.50	5.56	2.35
Independence	6.94	7.00	6.36	7.19	5.73
Compassion	6.84	5.99	5.93	6.50	9.29*
Collectivity	5.65	5.09	4.52	3.94	3.63
Collaboration	6.03	5.14	4.75	4.00	9.52*
Optimism	4.52	3.73	4.55	3.75	6.49
Discipline	6.55	7.47	8.25	9.06	23.11*

Note. \*p<.05

The teachers born in the 60s tended to value Responsibility significantly higher than the teachers born in the 90s. As shown in the Figure 6.8 below, the majority of the teachers from the 90s generation (Median=5.00, Mean=5.32, SD=2.48) and the 80s generation (Median=4.00, Mean=4.31, SD=2.47) ranked Responsibility between 2<sup>nd</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> while the majority of the teachers from the 70s generation (Median=2.50, Mean=3.02,

SD=2.03) and from the 60s generation (Median=2.00, Mean=2.88, SD=2.55) ranked Responsibility between 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>.

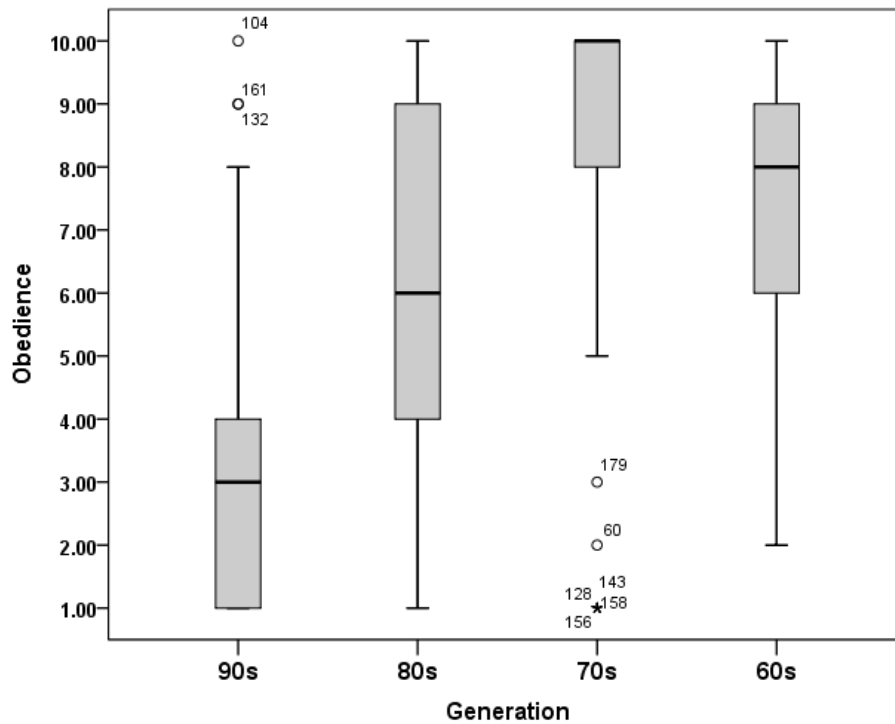


Figure 6.8. Ranking of Obedience Based on Teachers' Generation Group

**Collaboration.** There were significant differences in the ranking of Collaboration among the four groups depending on the teachers' generation ( $X^2(243, 3) = 9.52, p = .023 < .05$ ). The younger the generation the teachers belong to, the lower they ranked Collaboration. The teachers who are in the 90s generation (Mean rank=149.44) tended to rank Collaboration significantly lower than the teachers who are in the 80s generation (Mean rank=123.81), which ranked Collaboration significantly lower than the teachers who are in the 70s generation (Mean rank=111.37) and the teachers who are in the 60s generation (Mean rank=90.22). In other words, the younger the generation

teachers belong to, the less they valued Collaboration, while the older the generation teachers belong to, the more they valued it.

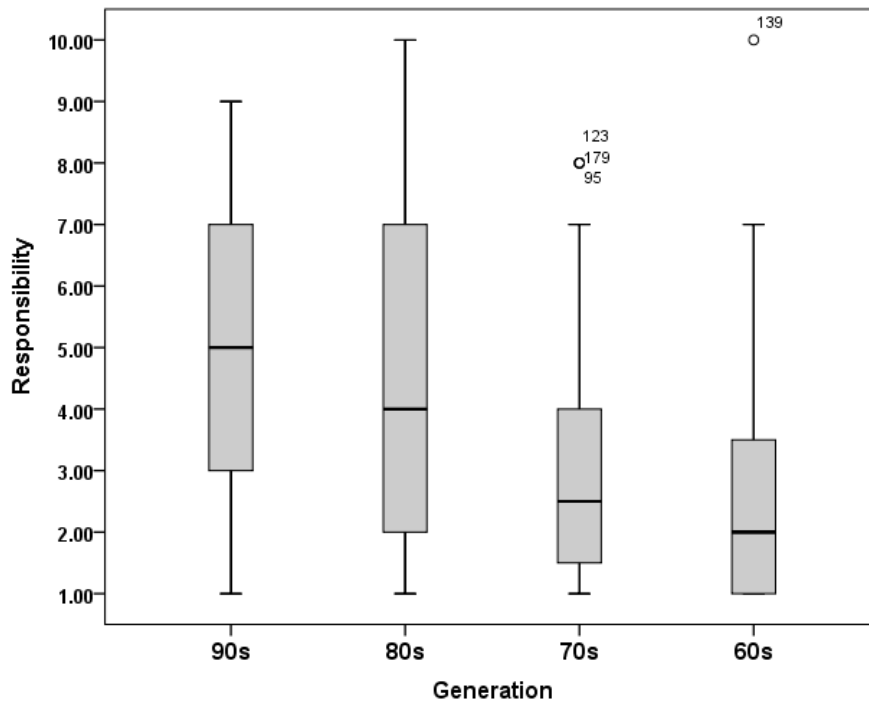


Figure 6.9. Ranking of Responsibility Based on Teachers' Generation Group

As shown in the Figure 6.10, with the generations getting older, the teachers' rankings on Collaboration are getting higher, suggesting that teachers valued Collaboration more as their generation gets older. About half of the teachers from the 90s generation ranked Collaboration between 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> (Median=6.00, Mean=6.03, SD=2.56), while half of the teachers from the 80s generation ranked Collaboration between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> (Median=5.00, Mean=5.14, SD=2.44). About half of the teachers who are from the 70s generation ranked Collaboration between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> (Median=4.50, Mean=4.75, SD=2.13), while over half of the teachers from the 60s generation ranked Collaboration between 2<sup>nd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> (Median=4.00, Mean=4.00, SD=2.07).

**Compassion.** There were significant differences in the ranking of Compassion among the four groups depending on the teachers' generation ( $\chi^2(243, 3) = 9.29, p = .023 < .05$ ). The younger the generation the teachers belong to, the lower they ranked Compassion. The teachers who are in the 90s generation (Mean rank=144.05) tended to rank Compassion significantly lower than the teachers who are in the 80s generation (Mean rank=126.76), which ranked Compassion significantly lower than the teachers who are in the 70s generation (Mean rank=108.76) and the teachers who are in the 60s generation (Mean rank=88.78). In other words, the younger the generation teachers belong to, the less they valued Compassion, while the older the generation teachers belong to, the more they valued it.

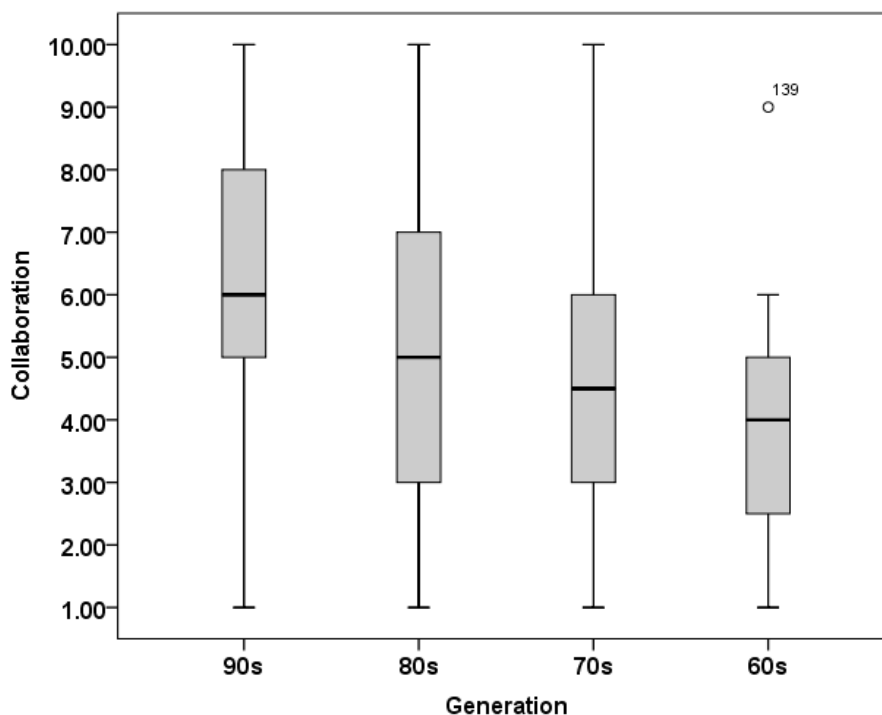


Figure 6.10. Ranking of Collaboration Based on Teachers' Generation Group

As shown in the Figure 6.11, the older the generation teachers belong to, the higher their ranking on Compassion. The three fourths of the teachers from the 90s

generation ranked Compassion between 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> (Median=7.00, Mean=5.65, SD=2.37), while three fourths of the teachers from the 80s generation ranked Compassion between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> (Median=5.00, Mean=5.09, SD=). Three fourths of the teachers who are from the 70s generation ranked Compassion between 2<sup>nd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> (Median=4.50, Mean=4.52, SD=2.16), while three fourths of the teachers from the 60s generation ranked Compassion between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>, with the lowest rank being 7<sup>th</sup> instead of 10<sup>th</sup> (Median=4.00, Mean=3.94, SD=1.81).

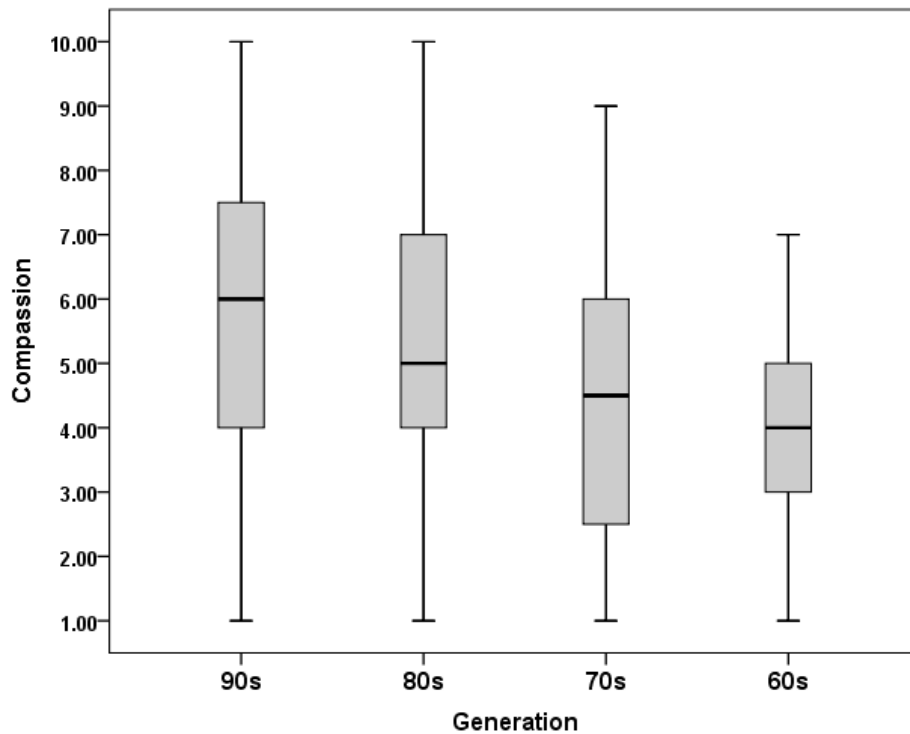


Figure 6.11. Ranking of Compassion Based on Teachers' Generation Group

**Conformity** (Discipline). There were significant differences in the ranking of discipline among the four groups depending on the teachers' generation ( $\chi^2(243, 3) = 23.11, p = .000 < .05$ ). The younger the generation the teachers belonged to, the higher they ranked discipline. The teachers who are in the 90s generation (Mean rank=85.76) tended to rank discipline significantly higher than the teachers who are in the 80s

generation (Mean rank=116.69), which ranked discipline significantly higher than the teachers who are in the 70s generation (Mean rank=139.76) and the teachers who are in the 60s generation (Mean rank=176.56). In other words, the younger the generation the teachers belonged to, the more they valued discipline while the older the generation the teachers belonged to, the less they valued discipline.

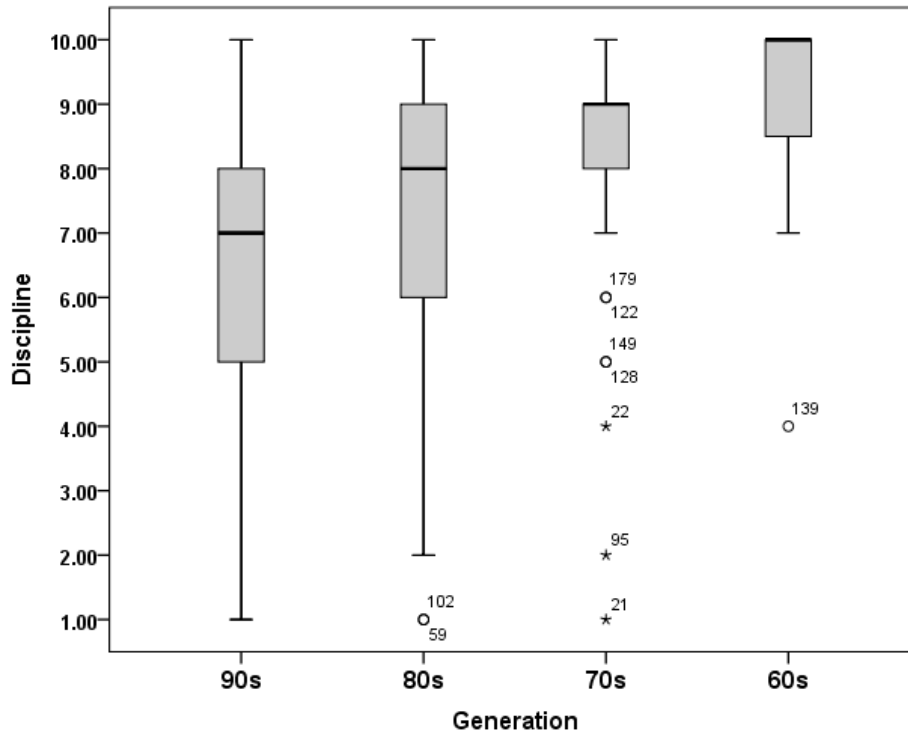


Figure 6.12. Ranking of Conformity Based on Teachers' Generation Group

As shown in the Figure 6.12, the older the teachers' generation, the lower they ranked conformity. The majority of teachers from the 90s generation ranked discipline between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> most important (Median=7.00, Mean=6.55, SD=2.22), while the majority of teachers from the 80s generation ranked discipline between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> most important (Median=8.00, Mean=7.47, SD=2.21). The majority (80%) of teachers from the 70s generation ranked discipline between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> most important



(Median=9.00, Mean=8.25, SD=1.88) and the majority (90%) of teachers from the 60s generation ranked discipline between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> most important (Median=10.00, Mean=9.06, SD=1.65).

### **Do Teachers' Rankings Associated with Other Demographical Variables?**

A total of 180 out of the 243 questionnaires contained a complete set of demographical information besides age, working experience and degree, and thus were used for further exploring the difference in teachers' rankings based on their demographical information.

According to KW tests, there are only statistically significant differences in teachers' rankings based on whether they have their own kids or not, as shown in Table 6.12. Teachers who have their own children ranked obedience and conformity significantly lower than teachers who do not have their own children, as shown in the Table 6.12.

In other words, teachers who have their own kids do not value obedience and conformity as much as teachers who do not have their own kids. Teachers who have their own children ranked responsibility, compassion, collectivity, and collaboration significantly higher than teachers who do not have their own children, suggesting teachers who have their own children tended to value more on responsibility, compassion, collectivity and collaboration than teachers who do not have their own children.

### **Summary**

The seven Likert scale items and the rank question are designed to measure and examine different aspects of the research questions. The Likert scale items are intended to confirm the definition of a good child by examining teachers' ratings on each attribute,

Table 6.13. KW Test on Kids (N=180)

	With Kids	With No Kids	Chi-Square
	Mean	Mean	
	(N=72)	(N=108)	
Individuality	4.32	4.27	.28
Obedience	7.85	4.97	34.38*
Responsibility	2.93	5.00	28.13*
Honesty	5.25	5.37	.21
Independence	7.46	7.48	.82
Compassion	5.99	6.62	6.08*
Collectivity	4.50	5.30	6.71*
Collaboration	4.65	5.46	5.32*
Optimism	3.40	3.31	.17
Conformity	7.97	7.15	9.09*

Note. \*p<.05

while the rank question is aimed at examining the relative level of importance each attribute weighs in teachers' perceptions. The relationships between teachers' rating scores and their demographics information in both the Likert scale questions and the rank question are explored.

Both consistencies and inconsistencies are found in the results between Likert scale and rank data. Teachers' ratings on Conformity, Responsibility, Collaboration and Independence are found to be associated with their age and working experience in both

Likert scale and rank data. Teachers' ratings on Optimism, Collectivity, Honesty and Responsibility are found to be associated with their educational background (i.e., degree) in both Likert scale and rank data.

There are statistically significant differences found in teachers' ratings on Responsibility, Independence, Collaboration, and Conformity in both Likert scale and rank data across generations. Inconsistency is also found in the findings on Obedience in KW tests results between Likert scale and rank data. Significant correlations between teachers' ratings on Obedience and their age, working experience, and degree are found in the rank data, but not in the Likert scale data.

The inconsistency in findings from the Likert scale and rank questions could be due to two primary reasons: different focuses and different sample sizes. First of all, Likert scale items are meant to examine the definition of each attribute while the rank question examines the level of relative importance of each attribute. In other words, the Likert scale items, although based on ordinal ranking questions for each item, provide a relatively independent cardinal evaluation of each individual attribute. A teacher's perception on the importance of attribute such as Independence would not be directly related to his or her perception on attribute such as Collectivity. The rank question, however, provides an ordinal comparison among the ten attributes; the ranking of one attribute is clearly influenced by those of all other attributes. The impacts of such a difference could be two-fold. For an instance, consider a teacher who believes that attributes such as Independence and Collectivity are both important, and attribute Independence is slightly more important than attribute Collectivity. While responding to the Likert scale questions, the teacher would not tend to compare the two attributes, and

might simply think “Independence is important, and so is Collectivity” and give almost identical ratings to both. Due to randomness in the teacher’s thinking process, even Collectivity would possibly get a higher rating than Independence – again, the teacher would not have made an effort to compare the two ratings. In contrast, the rank question forces the teacher to provide a relative ranking of the multiple attributes, which shall better reveal his or her real perceptions (and hence, be more suitable for this case). For another instance, consider a teacher who believes that attributes Independence, Individuality, Optimism and Collectivity are the most important attributes, and they are equally important. The Likert scale questions would allow the teacher to reveal such an “equal” perception, but the rank question would force the teacher to provide a relative rank. In such a situation, if the teacher randomly breaks the tie, with probability  $3/4$  attribute Independence will have to be ranked number two, three, or four. As such, the ranking for attribute Independence (and for the rest attributes, similarly) would show some inconsistency to the results from the Likert scale items.

The inconsistency in findings from the Likert scale and rank questions could also be due to the different sample sizes. There are 329 valid survey responses for Likert scale items while there are only 243 valid survey responses for the rank question. About 30% of the data are missing for the rank question, which could also contribute to some of the inconsistent results.

From my observation, the Likert scale data appear to be a little messier with too much noise but not enough signal. It could be caused by high correlations between dependent variables. While I tried to keep the fullness of each construct and represent the complexity of each construct on the Likert scale, this could have compromised the

separation of each construct from each other. I suspect that I could still take some hints from the results to improve the results, but there may be not enough to draw a well-supported conclusion from a statistical perspective. I am inclined to give more weight to the results from the rank question, which suggests statistically significant relationships between teachers' ranking and teachers' demographic characteristics.

## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSION

The central question driving the current study is whether Chinese teachers' beliefs about "what constitutes a good child" has changed over the past decade, what has changed, and what has not? I explored the meanings that underlie these conceptions, and scrutinizing the changes that transpired in the classrooms as well as in teachers' beliefs.

The following is an overview of Chinese teachers' conceptions of a good child, what changed in their perceptions and what stayed. The Chinese teachers interviewed believe that a good child should have the following qualities: individuality, independence, optimism, collaboration, collectivity, responsibility and honesty.

#### **Overview**

##### **Individuality**

Individuality is interpreted by Chinese teachers as "developing independent thinking" and "expressing one's opinions" and "being creative and different." Compared the classrooms that I observed in 2006, many changes have happened in the classrooms at the same school. The classroom now looks similar to a typical classroom in Montessori schools in the United States. There are open shelves full of Montessori teaching materials against the wall, with a big rectangular shaped open space in the middle. The classroom is divided into different sections such as a Montessori activity section (usually for individual work), a table activity section (usually for group work as well as academic work), a dramatic play section, and a free play section (usually for collaborative play).

The classroom is now set up in a way that encourages self-learning and independent thinking, and provides more choices to the children. The teaching approach

has also changed from teacher-directed didactic large group lessons to child-initiated individual activities along with teacher-facilitated large group lessons, with an emphasis on choice, self-expression, and a more democratic relationship between teacher and children.



Figure 7.1. Ms. Liu's Classroom at HIT

Teachers further promote individuality through their practices in the classrooms, such as involving children in classroom decision making, allowing children to negotiate with teachers, respecting children's decisions, and making children feel an ownership of their work as well as their classroom.

Teachers indicated that they prefer children to develop their creativity, expressiveness, and their own identity mostly because they believe that that is what it takes to succeed in Chinese society currently and in the foreseeable future.

As Ms. Wu eloquently put,

In order to succeed in our society, you need to have your own thing, whether it is academic achievement, or art, or singing, dancing or even playing computer games. You have to have something that makes you stand out from the rest of the people. . . . It used to be academic achievement or nothing in the old days, but nowadays, if you have your own thing, even if it is playing computer games, as long as you are good at it, you can have a good earning, and get the respect of others. . . . Second, you have to be able to express yourself as well as advocate for yourself. You need to let your voice be heard. Nowadays, it is not enough that you just do a good job. You also have to promote what you did to others, and sometimes even convince others to agree that you did a good job. . . . The good old days when all you needed was to do your job and people would see, and acknowledge what you did are gone. . . . That is why we are teaching and encouraging our children to express themselves, to be open and creative, and to find their own thing because we want them to succeed in the future, and have a happy life. (Excerpt from interview, 07-13-10)

## **Independence**

Three principal components are identified in the teachers' definition of independence: self-reliance, self-control and autonomy. Self-reliance stresses the ability to take care of oneself physically. Autonomy focuses on the ability to finish a job or solve a problem without help. Self-control emphasizes the ability to restrain oneself, especially from doing something wrong.

Teachers encourage the development of independence in children by incorporating basic life skills in their routines, facilitating children to gain control of their body through practice, and giving children latitude to work out their own solutions to problems.

The great value placed on independence by the Chinese teachers reflects both a historical tradition and a modern concern. In Chinese, "independence" means self-sufficiency or self-reliance, which was highly valued in Chinese tradition, especially among families (Xiao, 2001). In Confucianism, everyone in the family is expected to work hard to be self-sufficient. A person who cannot take care of himself or herself was



considered socially unacceptable and brought shame to the family. Independence is indeed a Chinese traditional value.

The prevalence of independence as a desirable quality in a child is also a reflection of an existing social issue in China. There is a common perception in China that most children have been spoiled due to the enforcement of the “one-child-per-family” policy. “Only children” were reported to be over-protected and over-cared for by their parents and grandparents (Xie & Hultgren, 1994). Furthermore, after these only children grew up and then became adults, those we call the Post-80s generation and Post-90s generation, some of them are still financially dependent on their parents. That is the case especially with the Post-90s generation. As seen on TV, newspaper, and Web, many of the Post-90s children feel entitled to everything and ask their parents to buy them cars and houses and find them jobs, and hold a grudge against their parents and sometimes even the society when their parents can not afford to, which has become a real social concern.

To address this issue, teachers and schools are expected by the society to educate children and help them become self-reliant and autonomous, which is why independence is highly valued, as indicated by the Chinese teachers interviewed in this study.

### **Optimism**

The meaning of optimism was constructed as having a positive yet objective attitude toward self, others, and undesirable situations as well.

On one hand, teachers believe that they should help children develop a positive self-perception through acknowledging the children’s efforts, encouraging them to try new things, and appreciating children’s individual characteristics in teachers’ practice.

On the other hand, they also insisted that the use of peer critiquing and constructive criticism in their classroom could benefit children and help them build a strong and “healthy” mentality.

The advocacy of optimism by the Chinese teachers is also a reflection of a social concern in contemporary China. The high suicide rate among Chinese teenagers and young adults has become a social problem that Chinese educators have to face. China has become one of the countries with the highest suicide rates in the world. The numbers are appalling: at least one person tries to kill himself in China every two minutes. Suicide has become the leading cause of death among people aged 15 to 34 in China. These facts are especially dreadful when considering that most families in China only have one child due to the “one child policy”.

Teachers feel the pressure as well as the necessity to teach children to have a positive attitude and a healthy mentality towards life and to prepare them for foreseeable hindrances in their life. As Ms. Wu lamented, “You hear on the radio and TV that teenagers kill themselves all the time, and for ridiculous reasons such as breaking up with a boyfriend, losing in a contest, being laughed at by peers, or even not being able to afford the designer clothes or bags they prefer. What happened to this generation of children (referring to the Post-90s generation)? What happened to our society?”

To address this social issue, “frustration education” is promoted in Chinese schools starting with preschools and kindergarten. As illustrated in the vignettes of this study, teachers will purposefully create challenging situations, providing opportunities for children to face the challenge and conquer the difficulties, reinforce their confidence throughout this process, and eventually to help children develop an optimistic mindset.

Along the same line, teachers embrace critique in their classrooms because they believe that children should be exposed to a certain amount of disapproval as long as it is controlled to an “acceptable” level, and they need to learn to approach it in a positive and constructive manner. As a teacher concisely put it, “After all, Chinese society is a critical society. Since you cannot change that, you had better find a way to deal with it. The earlier, the better.” (Excerpt from interview with Ms. Feng, 07-13-10)

I want to point out that even though criticism still exists in the classroom, the way of critiquing has changed to a more constructive and positive approach from straightforward criticism, such as starting with a positive remark such as “he did a really good job on the color,” using encouraging expressions such as “what can he do to make it even better?” and ending with applause from the class as a confirmation of the child’s work.

It is also worth mentioning that teachers’ encouragement of criticism in their classrooms does not impinge on their extensive utilization of positive reinforcement in their classrooms as well. For example, during Montessori large group lessons, the teachers would invite children one by one to demonstrate the materials. After each child is done, the teachers would ask the class, “Did he do a good job?” And the rest of the children would reply with “Yes,” and the teacher would say, “Let’s applaud for him.” Then the children would clap their hands together, chanting, “Clap, Clap, You are the best.” Sometimes, children would voluntarily chant without the teacher’s asking. During a 20-minute Montessori lesson at HFL, the children chanted “Clap, Clap, You are the best” 11 times, and the teacher used 14 complimentary phrases, such as “good job,”

“excellent work,” “smart way of doing,” “I like how you tried again and did not give up,” and so forth.

### **Collectivity**

Collectivity is an imperative part of continuing Chinese cultural values that has not changed. The teachers interviewed defined Collectivity in three aspects, group identity, group integrity, and group responsibility. Many daily classroom routines that embody the values of collectivity have stayed the same as with previous generations. The routines that emphasize uniformity and group identity are children standing up together and greeting the teacher with “Good morning, teacher” to indicate the official start of the school day, children going to the bathroom together as a class, while toilets are still long and open troughs with no doors or separations, and children standing in long lines on the playground and doing exercise together accompanied by music and instructions from a loudspeaker connected to a cd player (group calisthenics).

Other collective values, such as group responsibility, that underline daily practice in the classroom, could be found in the rituals of children taking turns at being on duty, and children on duty fulfilling their duties by such activities as distributing utensils to the class before lunch, cleaning the tables after lunch, and taking out cots and putting them back for the entire class.

### **Responsibility**

Responsibility was identified in the findings from both interviews and surveys of teachers and directors as the most important quality in a child. As Ms. Wu simply put it, “A good child is first a responsible child.” The meaning of responsibility can be understood in terms of responsibility for oneself and responsibility for the group one

belongs to (such as family), with an emphasis on the latter. Responsibility for the family has been greatly valued in Chinese tradition and Confucianism. In Chinese, there is a special term for it, filial piety: a virtue of respect and duty of care for one's parents. However, filial piety, is not only a virtue but also the law due to the increasing number of aging parents abandoned and neglected by their adult children especially in rural areas.

On July 1st, 2013, the Chinese government enacted a law aimed at compelling adult children to visit their aging parents. The law, called “Protection of the Rights and Interests of Elderly People,” has nine clauses that lay out the duties of children and their obligation to tend to the “spiritual needs of the elderly.” For instance, a clause stipulates: “Family members living apart from the elderly should frequently visit or send greetings to the elderly persons.”

Making filial duty a legal matter is a reflection of the monumental changes happening in Chinese society. Abandoning or mistreating aging parents has become a real issue across China, as seen on TV, in newspapers, and in Web sites. It is seen as the result of a preoccupation with material goods, accompanied by a rapidly growing market economy and the collapse of moral standards.

The adult children here mostly refer to those who were born in late 80s or earlier 90s, as we call them in China, the “Post-90s” generation. They are the first generation born and raised in a vastly consumerist society in which many of the Chinese traditional values were depreciated while Western values were promoted. Studies have repeatedly shown that members of the urban post-90 generation still depend on their parents for money after they become adults, and they consume 50% or more of their family's expenditures.

Teachers interviewed for this study are well aware of the changes that happened in Chinese society, and the great value they put on responsibility is also a manifestation of this social issue. As a teacher commented, “If one could not take his responsibility for his family, how could he be expected to fulfill his responsibility for the community and even the society? He obviously could not. That is why we are teaching our children to be responsible, starting with our great tradition, filial piety.”

### **Collaboration**

Collaboration is considered by Chinese teachers a desirable quality in a child. The meaning of collaboration has been redefined and reconstructed.

The traditional collective dimension of collaboration, such as caring and helping others as well as working in harmony with others, is still emphasized by teachers. Teachers indicated that they intentionally incorporate many group games and special events in their classroom activities (such as inviting 5-year-old children to the 3-year-old classroom to help and play with younger children) to provide children opportunities to take care of the younger or the older, to encourage them to help out at home (such as asking children what they did for their parents during the weekends), and to teach them to be caring people.

While the notion of collaboration still emphasizes that children be considerate and show empathy, along with some collectivist values such as being helpful and harmonious with others, the focus has changed from children being cooperative and compromising in group activities or working with others to children being equal agents for their team or when helping with others.

As illustrated in the vignettes in the Collaboration section, Ms. Liu concurred with the boy's choice to not comfort his friend who was crying during his work session because she believed that he should be entitled to his rights of working without interruption and his decision to not comfort his friend should also be respected. In another vignette describing children playing group games such as the three-legged relay race, the underlying concept that each child needs to carry his own weight while working together in order to win also suggests the shift of the focus of the meaning of collaboration.

### **Honesty**

Honesty, as a Chinese traditional virtue, is still highly valued by teachers. Honesty is rated by teachers in surveys as one of the three most important qualities in a good child. Teachers who had bachelor degrees tended to value honesty more than teachers who did not have them. As revealed in vignettes under Honesty, Chinese teachers take lying seriously, because they consider lying to be a huge flaw in one's character and integrity. For example, when a child is lying, most likely the teacher will criticize him directly and even get upset over it. As teachers indicated in their interviews, lying is "intolerable" and "unacceptable."

### **Obedience**

Obedience is no longer valued by Chinese teachers. In their perceptions, obedience is now a somewhat negative term implying that children can not think for themselves and only know how to follow adults' directions.

Obedience traditionally emphasizes the notion of "obeying the authority or hierarchy" and "respect for the hierarchy," which was the core of Confucian philosophy.

The meaning of obedience in a teaching situation could be understood as “listening to teachers” and “obeying the rules” in the preschool classrooms. As illustrated in the vignette “Who knocked over the bookshelf,” Ms. Liu demonstrated her preference of self-expression over submission in a child. She asserted her belief that the boy should explain or stand up for himself after he was mistakenly taken as the one who bumped books off the shelf. She did not value the aspect that he was being obedient. The other teachers in the interview resonated with her stance on obedience and conveyed that they did not consider obedience as a desirable quality in a child.

With that said, some findings in the questionnaires are contradictory. Twenty teachers out of 243 ranked obedience as the first most important quality in a good child, and 64 teachers out of 243 ranked obedience as one of the three most important qualities in a good child. The teachers who ranked obedience as the first most important quality in a child are comparatively young with an average age of 23 years old. Seventy percent of them are between 17 and 23 years old. Similarly, the average age of teachers who ranked obedience as one of the three most important qualities in a child is also 23 years old, with 70 percent of them ranging from 16 years old to 24 years old.

To further explore this issue, I discussed this contradiction with Ms. Wu (the director at HFL) and with the only teacher I interviewed who was in that age range (between 17 and 23 years old), Ms. Ming. Ms. Wu pointed out that managing a classroom could be challenging for young teachers who did not have much experience and had just started working at preschools. That would be especially true for teachers who were younger than 20 years old, because some of them are still teenagers themselves, which could be the reason that they value obedience in a child. Another reason could be that



these young teachers did not have a higher education or professional training in early childhood education. For example, teachers who are only 16 and 17 years old did not even go to high school, and they usually went to a two-year training school after middle school. Lack of higher education and formal training in early childhood education might make these young teachers only care about whether children are listening to them instead of respecting children as individuals, which is why they appreciated obedience so much.

In summary, many Chinese traditional values such as responsibility, collectivity, self-efficacy, and honesty are still valued in children, even though the meaning of each attribute has somewhat changed in varying degrees. Emerging Western values such as individuality and autonomy have also found their place in teachers' beliefs as well as in the larger Chinese culture. The reasons that these Western values are preferred, as suggested by teachers, are mostly because they are congruent with the demands of a full-blown market economy, the need to address existing social issues in Chinese society, and the need to re-establish the moral standards of Chinese culture.

### **Tensions between Individualism and Collectivism**

The prevailing concern or question is how individuality can exist in a collectivism-based society like China. Is Chinese society no longer collective?

I argue that the development of individualism does not necessarily conflict with the existing collectivism in Chinese society. For example, teachers put great emphasis on self-expression (individuality) while also asking children to be sensitive to the un verbalized feelings of others (collectivity). These values seem to represent a conflict, yet the behaviors co-exist because they both are needed in current Chinese culture. And

sometimes individualism is given new meanings and adapted to local conditions. The following example can further illustrate that point.

There is a Montessori activity, “Walking on the line,” in every classroom in both schools I visited. This activity is an exercise where teachers invite children to walk on a line that forms a big rectangular shape on the floor in the middle of the classroom. The goal of this exercise is to help the child control his body, focusing on the interaction between the child’s mind, body, and the line. It is a very individualized activity. In American Montessori classrooms, usually 3 to 4 children would be invited to do this activity, which can make spacious room for each child to walk without worrying about bumping into other children. The teachers are not supposed to speak, so children can concentrate on walking on the line. In the Chinese classrooms I observed, this Montessori activity is also adopted and practiced very frequently. However, it is not 3 or 4 children who are invited to walk on the line. It is the entire class (which includes 24 to 30 children, depending on the school) who walk on the line altogether, as shown in the picture below. During my observation, I heard the teacher keep reminding the children to keep their pace, not too fast (so they would not bump into the children in front of them), not too slow (so they would not slow down the speed for the entire class). Children who were doing a good job were called to walk on the line that formed a smaller rectangular shape as exemplars. The teacher would praise the children she chose by giving comments such as, “Look what a good job that Xiaoli did! For friends who can not walk very well, please look at her and learn from her. I will see who else is doing a good job as well, and I will call them to walk in the smaller rectangle.”

This is a good example of how such an individualized Montessori activity was localized and transformed to a collective activity with emphasis on uniformity. The focus of this activity has changed for the child from controlling his body to being in the same pace with the rest of group. Given the limited space between each child, children had to constantly stop and adjust their pace while paying attention to the rest of the group. In addition, the teacher would keep drawing their attention to the exemplar children, which further makes this activity a group demonstration.

And this transformation has been made through unconscious efforts of the teachers. The teachers indicated that they were not aware of the change in the focus, and they thought that they were doing exactly what other teachers would do in Montessori classrooms elsewhere.

While some of the changes happened unconsciously in the classrooms, some of them happened through deliberate efforts of the teachers.

During my interview with Ms. Liu, she shared her personal experience about how she realized that she needed to change herself in order to receive the respect and acknowledgement that she deserves. In her illustration, she characterized herself as “modest,” “conservative,” as well as “giving,” which were valued in a person twenty years ago but no longer promoted. She realized that she had to become more “assertive” as well as “aggressive” to get more recognized at her work, which she did. In her own words, “I do not think myself as an aggressive person and I do not think it is in me, but I will bring the best of my aggressive side when needed and continue to improve myself in the direction of becoming more assertive because that is what works in the current society.”

She also indicated that she made efforts encouraging children to express themselves and stand up for themselves in her classrooms. The vignettes in the previous chapter that happened in her classroom are consistent with her descriptions.

### **Teachers' Beliefs across Generations**

Another way to look at how Chinese culture has changed is to examine and compare teachers' beliefs across four generations.

During the interviews, teachers frequently brought up the terms "Post-90s generation," "Post-80s generation," and "Post-70s generation" and the issues associated with each generation. It seems that there is a common belief in China that each generation shares certain characteristics and values that are tied only to that generation. Many teachers indicated that they concur with that belief in their interviews.

To better address this issue, I included a brief overview and comparison of each generation and their characteristics.

#### **Post-80s Generation**

The post 80s is a generation of approximately 240 million people born between 1980 and 1990. The term first came into use in the late 1990s due to the vast changes that happened in China in 1980s, and as a result those who were born in the 1980s were considered completely different than the previous generation.

Post 80s are the first generation born during the enforcement of China's one-child policy. They grew up as China transitioned from a planned economy to a market economy. Some of them (especially those born in the early 1980s) still experienced in their formative years the rarity of consumer goods caused by the planned economy, while

most of them lived a life that was relatively affluent, especially compared to the 70s generation.

On one hand, the 80s generation's values are still rooted in traditional Chinese culture and Confucian morals, such as hard work and responsibility. On the other hand, they also have been exposed to Western values through the internet and foreign business in China, but not so much in their early years, due to the fact that the internet was not commercialized in China until 1995.

### **Post-90s Generation**

In China, the “post-90s” generation refers to the generation that was born between 1990 and 2000. The post-90s generation is approximately 135 million (constituting 11.7% of the entire population).

The Post-90s generation is the first generation to grow up with the internet and mobile phones, as well as computer games and western pop music, along with rapid economic growth and rampant consumerism in China. They are the generation that has been most influenced by Western culture due to the proliferation of communication and information technology, greater access to foreign goods and services, and remarkable increases in family discretionary income.

The prevailing complaint about this generation is that they are a generation who grew up with materialism and no moral guidance. They grew up in a vastly consumerist society in which many of the Chinese traditional values of modesty and conformity no longer count. They are not familiar with cultural norms that remain ingrained in Chinese society.

### **Post-70s Generation**

The Post-70s generation refers to the generation that was born between 1970 and 1979. This generation grew up with a central planned economy. There was almost no private enterprise or foreign-invested firms in China in the 1970s.

In their formative years, the people of the 70s generation were not much influenced by media due to the rarity of TV (given that TV was not common in China until 1987) and the non-existence of the internet. As a result, they were most influenced by their family (especially their parents) and by school education. They were educated to respect traditional values, especially collective values such as harmony and selflessness. They tend to put the family ahead of the self. Even though the Cultural Revolution ended in 1976, the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution still existed. This generation was taught to be cautious and careful about their comments towards authority, and thus they have a tendency to obey and respect authority.

### **Post-60s Generation**

No literature officially documenting the term “Post-60s generation,” although it was frequently brought up on TV, in newspapers, Web sites, and in daily conversations in references to “Post-70s,” “Post-80s,” or “Post-90s.” The definition of “Post-60s generation” refers to the generation that was born between 1960 and 1970. This generation grew up when China was going through a period of social and economic decline due to poverty, the Great Chinese Famine, and the Cultural Revolution. The Great Chinese Famine refers to the widespread famine that happened between 1958 and 1961 due to drought, poor weather, and political policies. There were an estimated 45 million deaths due to starvation between 1959 and 1962. The Post-60s generation also went

through the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), which brought China's education system to a virtual halt for ten years. Universities and colleges were terminated countrywide while primary and middle schools were cancelled in many areas. As a result, many of them were not well-educated.

### **Comparison of Four Generations**

The 80s generation is usually open to change because its members went through a lot of changes in their formative years along with China's experience of dramatic social and economic changes. They are hardworking, goal-driven, and aggressive, which could be because they are confronted with job instability and rising living costs (such as skyrocketing house prices) brought by the development of a nearly full blown market economy in China. They honor their responsibilities to their family and they value friends and community, which could be the result of the one-child policy, and they are the first generation without any siblings. They might see themselves as "individualistic," but they tend to self-express within accepted rules because part of their thinking is still ingrained with traditional Chinese culture.

The 90s generation is often marked with such labels as "selfish" and "irresponsible" for their lack of the responsibility to their family and to the community. They are also known for their creativity, boldness, and openness to pursuing materialistic self-fulfillment and individualistic self-expression.

The 70s generation tended to value stability and uniformity because the centrally planned economic systems put little emphasis on profitability or competition.

The common characteristics of the 70s generation include, but are not limited to, conformity, harmony, selflessness, vague and indirect expression, and familism. I would

speculate, as a member of the 70s generation, that they are also a generation that is very critical of themselves and most likely to adjust themselves to the changing environment.

Given that the Post-60s generation was born and raised while China went through a historically most difficult time due to famine, poverty and political reasons, they tended to be very cautious, suspicious, and conservative, while they value financial security, stability, hard work, and family responsibility. It is worth noting that most of them are parents of Post-90s generation.

### **Comparison of Values of Teachers across Generations**

In the current study, over 60 percent of teachers who participated in the survey are Post-80s generation while about 20 percent of them are Post-70s generation, 15 percent are Post-90s generation, and 5 percent are Post-60s generation. Across these four generations, significant differences are found in teachers' perceptions of "what constitutes a good child" as well as their preferences towards each attribute.

Teachers of older generations, such as the 60s generation and 70s generation, tended to appreciate more traditional and collective values such as responsibility, honesty, collectivity, and collaboration, while teachers of younger generations, such as the 90s and 80s generations, tended to value individuality more. For example, teachers of the 60s generation and 70s generation are much more likely to rank responsibility as the most important quality in a good child than those of younger generations such as the 90s and 80s generation. Among four generations of teachers, teachers of the 90s generation has valued responsibility the least. Yet, teachers of the 90s generation tend to rank individuality much higher than those of 80s generation, indicating that Post-90s teachers value individuality more than Post-80s teachers.



The issues that came up in the interview also resonate with the finding that teachers of the older generations appeared to value collective values more than teachers of the younger generations. One example is this generational bias is seen in the vignette where the child forgot to wear the red shirt that was designated for the flag-raising ceremony and was criticized by his teacher who is Post-70s. When I discussed this matter with another teacher in the classroom who was born in the late 80s, she held a different view, “I do not understand why formality is so important. As long as we are there for the ceremony and show our respect, I believe that is good enough. The child should not be criticized over that.”

In summary, the difference of values across teachers of four generations could perhaps provide another angle to examine and reflect how Chinese culture has changed throughout the years.

### **Conclusion**

China has five thousand years of history. During the past three decades, the People’s Republic of China has gone through changes that China never experienced before due to the advent and development of a market economy, the “open-door” policy, the “only child” policy, globalization, and the spread of internet. China, for the first time in its history, established its economic status in the world as the country with the second largest, and rapidly growing, economy. In the process it has exposed itself to unprecedented Western philosophies, technologies, cultures and lifestyles.

These changes not only affected Chinese people’s everyday life, but also greatly influenced their beliefs and values, making them rethink the relationships between individual interests and group integrity, individual rights and collective responsibility,

and morality and utility. With individualism and self-interest becoming more and more accepted, some Chinese traditional beliefs and values, such as group integrity and conformity, began to collapse.

Research has documented the decline of traditional values and the emergence of Western values in China, especially in Shanghai and Beijing (e.g., Pan et al., 1994; Slotboom et al., 1998; Xiao, 2001). This decline is especially true of those born after 1990s. For example, Cen (2011) found that Chinese high school students showed negative feelings toward collective responsibility even though they understood and accepted it to a certain degree.

To address the changes in the society and in people's values, the national guidelines for education were revised in 2001 to promote individualism and a child-initiated curriculum beginning in preschool. Since 2003, China has been undergoing a new round of curriculum reforms in basic education with a new integrated curriculum in moral education entitled *Sixiang Pinde* (思想品德 Thought and Character) (People's Education Press, 2003, 2004, 2005). Even though collectivism and socialism are still emphasized as guiding principles in the new curriculum, there is a salient recognition of self or individual (Tse, 2011). Personal rights, self-esteem, autonomy, and uniqueness are promoted as valuable and desirable qualities of a good citizen (Vol.7A, pp. 27–32, 45–56, 90–97; Vol.7B, pp. 3–57, 108–114; Vol.8B, pp. 22–97; as cited in Tse, 2011). The new curriculum also asserts that students should cherish and love life, develop self-esteem, independence, self-encouragement, and positive relationships (Tse, 2011).

The changes occurring in China are characterized by tensions between individualism and collectivism, such as the tensions between the open market economy

and the dominant one-party political system, and between traditional and collective values that have existed in Chinese culture for thousands of years and Western values promoted by the market economy over the past three decades.

On one hand, the political system in China has not changed fundamentally (Fairbrother, 2004; Martin, 1975; Wilson, 1980). The government is still run by one dominant party—the Communist Party—and the Chinese government’s plan to separate the legal system from the Party has not yet been implemented (Shaw, 1998). The Communist Party still has absolute control over law, education, and media. On the other hand, the development of a market economy and opening to the outside world have loosened the ruling party’s control over individuals and led to an emergence of diverse values (Young, 1998). For example, the Chinese government has signed a number of international human rights conventions, agreeing to follow these conventions (Young & Guo, 2003). There has been some progress toward development of individual rights and protection of legitimate self-interests, at least on paper (Svensson, 2002; Weatherley, 1999). The exceptionally rapid and regionally uneven economic growth, income distribution, and economic injustice brought by the market economy has also undermined the power of central government.

Another tension is between existing collectivist values and the emerging individualist values. China has been a collectivism-based society for thousands of years. Chinese culture has long been socially and collectively oriented (Ando, 1965; Forster, 1936), emphasizing social harmony, interpersonal relationships, and the collective good (Hofstede, 1983). Studies have consistently verified that collective responsibility, group integrity, conformity, obedience, respect, hard work, and selflessness were highly valued

in parenting, schooling, and other aspects of Chinese culture (e.g., Pang, 1988; Su & Wang, 1988).

A good child, then, was considered to be a child with these qualities. Specifically, a good child needed to be obedient, cooperative, group-oriented, responsible, selfless, diligent, and have respect for authority. As China experiences profound economic, political, and social changes, the cultural view of a good child has also changed. This study aimed to understand this changed, and changing, view of a good child from the perspective of Chinese teachers. It did this by examining the changes as well as the continuity in the classrooms, teachers' practices, and teachers' beliefs.

Many changes have occurred in Chinese preschools and kindergartens—changes in the classrooms, changes in teaching approaches, and changes in teachers' conceptions. The classrooms I studied look much like a typical Montessori classroom in the United States, with open space in the middle and Montessori materials stored on the fringes, giving children choices as well as space to work independently and roam freely. The teaching approach has also changed, from teacher-prescribed didactic large-group lessons to a more integrated curriculum with child-initiated activities accompanying teacher-facilitated group lessons. These changes reflect the changes in teachers' beliefs, from an emphasis on collectivity to a focus on creativity and individual rights.

Much has also remained the same. Most of the traditional and cultural rituals and routines are still maintained in the classroom, such as children standing up as a class and greeting the teacher before the class starts, children expressing their appreciation for the teacher by saying, "Thank you, teacher," loud and in unison before they start their lunch, children going to the toilet together as a class, and children taking turns at being on duty

for chores. The emphasis on mastery and performance has not changed, neither has the frequent use of exemplars and critiques as a strategy for improving children's performance. The presence of these cultural rituals and practices indicate a continuity in Chinese culture as well as a preservation of Chinese traditional values like group integrity and responsibility.

This study examined a shift of values and beliefs of Chinese teachers that has reflected changes in their classrooms as well as in Chinese society. Teachers' conceptualizations of "a good child" are congruent with the demands of China's changing economic and social conditions as well as the need to maintain, and even restore, Chinese moral and cultural distinctiveness. A good child should have both the characteristics needed to succeed in consumerist China, characteristics like individuality, creativity, and independence, as well as the qualities needed to maintain traditional Chinese morality, for example, collective responsibility and filial piety. A good child is a child who will succeed in contemporary China. He is going to be "a new kind of citizen with a new kind of subjectivity, an individual, but one with Chinese characteristics" (Tobin, 2009).

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## APPENDIX A

### SURVEY

Dear teachers,

I am currently conducting a research study supervised by Professor Daniel Walsh at Department of Curriculum and Instruction at University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC). The purpose of this survey is to understand your views and experiences as a teacher in China. Participation in this survey is voluntary, and you may choose to stop answering questions at any time. The survey will take approximately 15 minutes. Your response is anonymous as we will not be asking for any personally identifying information. Please do not write your name anywhere on this questionnaire. Your answers will be kept confidential and the findings of the survey will only be accessible to the researcher. The findings of this study will be published as dissertation and could potential be disseminated as journal articles. There is no known risk for you to participate in this questionnaire. Your participation will in no way affect your job or your personal life. There is no direct benefit for you in participating in this survey either. I can only hope that these questions below will help you think about your values as a teacher.

If you agree to participate in the survey, you can proceed to the survey attached. After you are done, please put the survey back in the enclosed envelope and drop it off at any post office. You can keep a copy of the consent letter for your record. If you do not wish to participate, please throw away the package.

Please contact Wei Liu at [weiliu1@illinois.edu](mailto:weiliu1@illinois.edu) or 001-217-721-7115 or Daniel Walsh at [danielw@illinois.edu](mailto:danielw@illinois.edu) or 001-217-244-1218 if you have any questions regarding this survey. If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this study, you can contact UIUC Institutional Review Board at [irb@illinois.edu](mailto:irb@illinois.edu) or Suite 203, MC-419, 528 East Green Street, Champaign, IL, 61820, 001- 217-333-2670. You can also contact Anne Robertson, Director of Office of School-University Research-Relations, Bureau of Educational Research, College of Education, UIUC, 001-217-333-3023, [robrtsn@illinois.edu](mailto:robrtsn@illinois.edu).

Thank you for your participation!



1: Strongly Disagree 7: Strongly Agree

1.	A good child always follows the classroom rules.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2.	A good child should be honest.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3.	A good child should be optimistic when encountering a problem.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4.	A good child should have a positive view of self.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5.	A good child should have his own opinion.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6.	A good child should be amenable to discipline.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7.	A good child should have his own thing.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8.	A good child should have the courage to admit his mistakes.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9.	A good child is considerate of others' feelings.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10.	A good child shares with others.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11.	A good child should have a positive view of others.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
12.	A good child is able to make his decision.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
13.	A good child is responsible for his behavior.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
14.	A good child always offers help to others.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
15.	A good child is creative.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
16.	A good child is not selfish.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
17.	A good child should have responsibility.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
18.	A good child always finishes his assigned work.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
19.	A good child works in harmony with others.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
20.	A good child always obeys his teacher.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

21.	A good child should be enthusiastic towards life.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
22.	A good child should care about group integrity.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
23.	A good child always participates in group activities.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
24.	A good child should think independently.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
25.	A good child raises his hand before he talks.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
26.	A good child does not have to care for others.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
27.	A good child always finishes his work by himself.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
28.	A good child should feel honor to be part of group.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
29.	A good child does not have to follow rules.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
30.	A good child always try to solve problems on his own.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Please rank the importance of the following qualities that you believe a good child should have from 1 to 10. (1 is the most important and 10 is the least important)

Obedience	
Individuality	
Independence	
Responsibility	
Honesty	
Optimism	
Compassion	
Collectivity	
Conformity	
Collaboration	

Background Information:

1. You are \_\_\_\_ female \_\_\_\_ male.
2. Your current highest academic degree is \_\_\_\_\_.
3. You have been working in kindergarten for \_\_\_\_\_ years.
4. The number of professional organization memberships you hold is \_\_\_\_\_.
5. The number of academic journals you read monthly is \_\_\_\_\_.
6. The number of professional conferences you went every year is \_\_\_\_\_.
7. How frequently do you use internet? \_\_\_\_daily \_\_\_\_weekly  
\_\_\_\_monthly \_\_\_\_yearly
8. Do you have children? \_\_\_\_Yes \_\_\_\_No

**THANK YOU VERY MUCH!!**

APPENDIX B

SURVEY SCORING PLAN

Construct	Item No.	Item Content
Individuality	5	A good child should have his own opinion.
	7	A good child should have his own thing.
	12	A good child is able to make his decision.
	15	A good child is creative.
Independence	24	A good child should think independently.
	27	A good child always finishes his work by himself.
	30	A good child always try to solve problems on his own.
Optimism	3	A good child should be optimistic when encountering a problem.
	4	A good child should have a positive view of self.
	11	A good child should have a positive view of others.
	21	A good child should be enthusiastic towards life.
Collaboration	9	A good child is considerate of others' feelings.
	10	A good child shares with others.
	14	A good child always offers help to others.
	16	A good child is not selfish.
	19	A good child works in harmony with others.
	26	A good child does not have to care for others.
Collectivity	22	A good child should care about group integrity.
	23	A good child always participates in group activities.
	28	A good child should feel honor to be part of group.
Responsibility	13	A good child is responsible for his behavior.
	17	A good child should have responsibility.
	18	A good child always finishes his assigned work.

Honesty	2	A good child should be honest.
	8	A good child should have the courage to admit his mistakes.
Obedience	20	A good child always obeys his teacher.
	25	A good child raises his hand before he talks.
Conformity	1	A good child always follows the classroom rules.
	6	A good child should be amenable to discipline.

## APPENDIX C

### INTERVIEW SAMPLE QUESTIONS FOR TEACHERS

#### **First Interview**

1. Personal background
  - 1.1 Could you tell me a little about yourself?
  - 1.2 How old are you?
  - 1.3 How long have you worked as a preschool teacher?
  - 1.4 Where did you receive your professional training?
2. Teaching experiences
  - 2.1 What made you become a teacher?
  - 2.2 Do you like being a teacher? What part of it do you like most?
  - 2.3 If you have to use three words to describe yourself, what would you say?
  - 2.4 Tell me more about your class?

#### **Second and Follow-up Interview**

1. Experience
  - 1.1 Could you tell me what happened this morning (referring to a specific event)?
  - 1.2 Does that happen very often? Could you tell me something similar to that happened in your classroom?
  - 1.3 Could you tell me more about this child in general (referring to a specific child involved in the event)?
  - 1.4 Could you tell me about your expectations toward his behavior?
2. Perceptions
  - 1.1 Could you tell me more about what you mean by “independence”?
  - 1.2 Could you give me an example of “being independent”?
  - 1.3 Could you tell me reasons that you believe “independence” is important?
  - 1.4 Have you always valued independence? Do you think your values have changed? If so, what point did you change your opinion on that?

## APPENDIX D

### INTERVIEW AND OBSERVATION CONSENT FORM

You are being invited to participate in a study that I am conducting as part of my Ph.D. degree in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign under the supervision of Professor Daniel Walsh. Please take the time to read the following information carefully and feel free to ask me if you have any questions or if you need more information.

The purpose of both interview and observation is to understand your views and experiences as a teacher in China. For the observation, I will sit quietly in the back of your classroom for a period of one week, from Monday through Friday, from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. and from 2 p.m. to 3 p.m. I will take field notes during my observation. There might be minimal risks involved for you to agree to be observed. The presence of a stranger might distract children in your classroom and might influence your teaching. However, the effect usually wears out after a couple of days and I will sit in a corner that is not obtrusive to the classroom flow or wherever you feel comfortable to minimize any inconvenience that my presence might bring.

For the interview, each interview should last no more than 20 minutes. The interview will take place in teachers' lounge or your office. You might be asked to participate in one to four interviews. Please note that you are not obligated to participate in any more interviews than you want to. During our interview, if there are any questions that you would prefer not to answer, please feel free to let me know and we will move on to next question. If you would like to stop the interview at any time, please let me know and we will end our interview immediately. I will take some notes during our interview and audio record the entire interview. You are entitled to obtain a transcribed copy of our interview.

There are no known risks to you for participating in the interview. Your answers will be kept confidential and be only accessible to me. Your real name will be replaced with a fictional name. All the recordings, transcriptions, and transcribed notes that contain any identifying participant information will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the personal possession of me. When no longer necessary for research, all materials will be destroyed.

There are no direct benefits to you for your participation in this study. However, I hope that through this study you will able to raise more awareness of your own beliefs and values, which eventually will help you improve your teaching and better assist children in your classroom.

Your participation is completely voluntary and you may refuse to participate at any time with no penalty. Your decision will not influence your employment status. If you have any questions about this research, you can call me at 001-217-721-7115 or email me at weiliu1@illinois.edu. You may also contact my dissertation advisor, Daniel Walsh at

001-217-244-1218 or at danielw@illinois.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this study, you can contact UIUC Institutional Review Board at irb@illinois.edu or Suite 203, MC-419, 528 East Green Street, Champaign, IL, 61820, 001-217-333-2670. You can also contact Anne Robertson, Director of Office of School-University Research-Relations, Bureau of Educational Research, College of Education, UIUC, 001-217-333-3023, robtrsn@illinois.edu.

Wei Liu  
Department of Curriculum and Instruction  
College of Education  
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign  
May 27, 2010

By signing this consent form, I confirm that I have read and understood the information and have had the opportunity to ask questions. I understand that my participation is completely voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason and without any penalty. I understand that I will be given a copy of this consent form.

I agree to be observed for this study. [check one]:

Yes          No

_____ Participant's signature	_____ Date	_____ Investigator's signature	_____ Date
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I agree to be interviewed for this study. [check one]:

Yes          No

_____ Participant's signature	_____ Date	_____ Investigator's signature	_____ Date
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I agree to be audio taped during this interview. [check one]:

Yes          No

_____ Participant's name	_____ printed	_____ Investigator's name	_____ printed
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## APPENDIX E

### PARENT CONSENT FORM

Dear Parents,

I am currently conducting a research study supervised by Professor Daniel Walsh at Department of Curriculum and Instruction at University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC). The purpose of my study is to understand teachers' views and values toward children. I will observe the classroom where your child is. The focus of my observation is teachers' interaction with children and teachers' teaching practice. I will observe for a period of one week, from Monday through Friday, from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. and from 2 p.m. to 3 p.m. I will take field notes during my observation.

There are no foreseen risks, discomfort or stresses for your child to participate in my study. If the word of your child is quoted or the interaction between your child and teacher is noted, a pseudonym will be used to ensure that your child cannot be identified in any way. You or your child can withdraw consent to be part of this study at any time without penalty. The benefit for this study is that it can help teachers become aware of their values, expectations, and attitudes toward children. Consequently, teachers could better assist your child in the classroom.

Your child's participation is completely voluntary and you may refuse to participate at any time with no penalty. Your decision will not influence you or your child. If you have any questions about this research, you can call me at 001-217-721-7115 or email me at [weiliu1@illinois.edu](mailto:weiliu1@illinois.edu). You may also contact my dissertation advisor, Daniel Walsh at 001-217-244-1218 or at [danielw@illinois.edu](mailto:danielw@illinois.edu). If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this study, you can contact UIUC Institutional Review Board at [irb@illinois.edu](mailto:irb@illinois.edu) or Suite 203, MC-419, 528 East Green Street, Champaign, IL, 61820, 001-217-333-2670. You can also contact Anne Robertson, Director of Office of School-University Research-Relations, Bureau of Educational Research, College of Education, UIUC, 001-217-333-3023, [robrtsn@illinois.edu](mailto:robrtsn@illinois.edu).

By keeping this consent form, you agree that your child will participate in the study. If you do NOT wish your child to participate in this study, please sign below and return this form to the teacher.

I do NOT agree that my child participates in this study.

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Parent's signature

Date